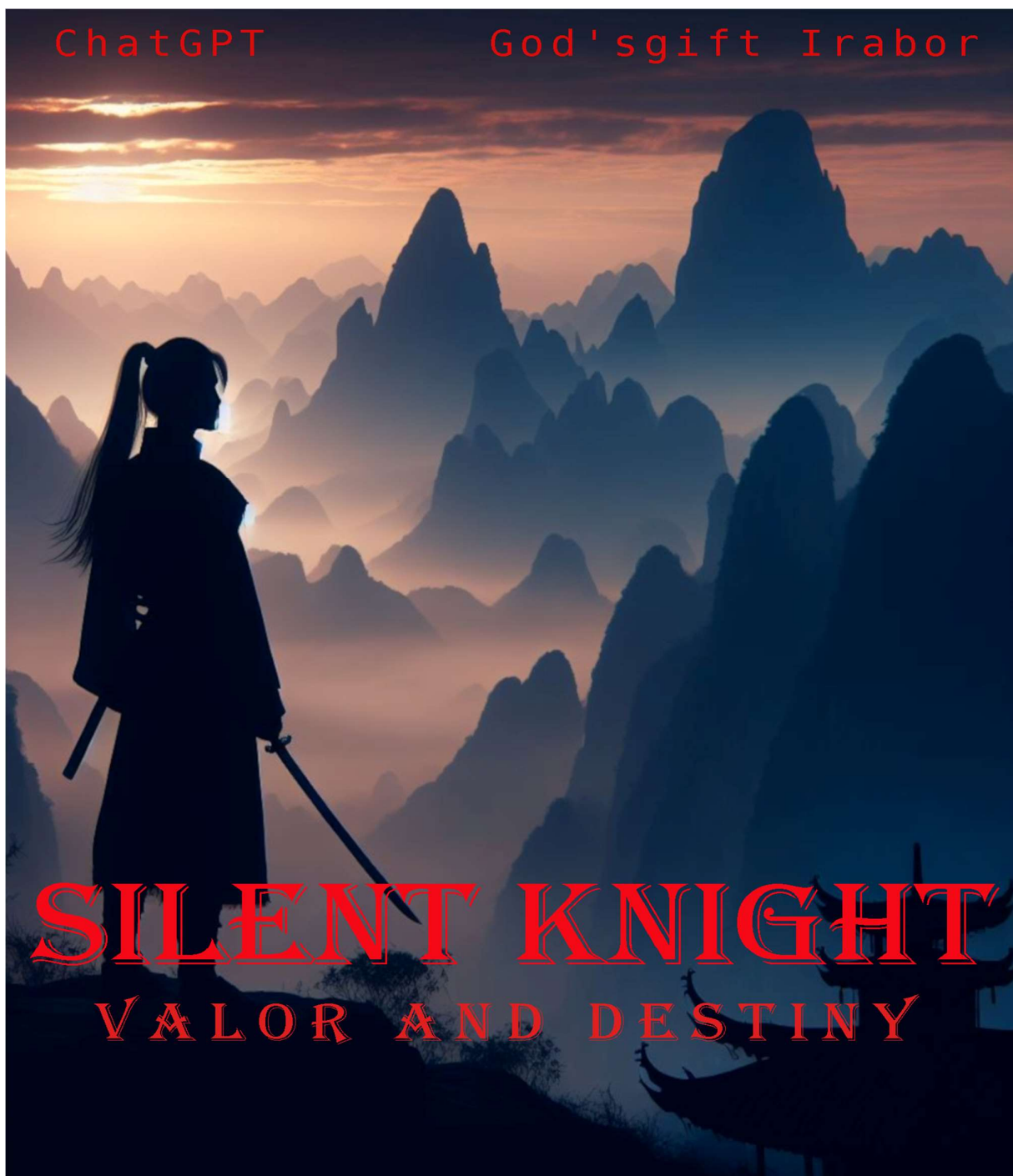


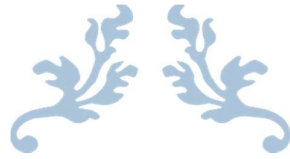
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SILENT KNIGHT

VALOR AND DESTINY



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EDITED BY

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SILENT KNIGHT: VALOR AND DESTINY

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LIST OF CHARACTERS

Chinese names are written with surname first.

Major Characters

Wang Junjie	A teen boy perceived as a disaster but deeply loved by his parents.
Wang Min	Mother of Junjie, known affectionately as Māmā.
Wang Deming	Father of Junjie, affectionately called Pà.
Raccomato (Raccoon)	A silly raccoon, sidekick to Junjie, affectionately called Duizhǎng.
Fenhua	A black horse belonging to Junjie.
Ling An	A seasoned shaman, warrior, bearer, and guardian of the Mystical Blade; later becomes Junjie's master, known affectionately as Zhǎngwò.
Mysterious Girl	A daring teen warrior with unearthly features.
Positive Illusion	The thoughts of the mysterious girl materialized into illusions embodying positivity.
Negative Illusion	The thoughts of the mysterious girl materialized into illusions embodying negativity.
General Gang Zhou	General of the Chinese army.
Captain Zhang Duyi	A captain of the Chinese army.
Captain Xiu Lan	A captain of the Chinese army and the sidekick to General Gang Zhou.
Qi Rong	Aide to the emperor.
Imperial Scout	The one who delivered the conscription notice to Wang Min.
Li Dong	A soldier in the Chinese army, friends with Longwei Gen and Mingyu Han.
Longwei Gen	A soldier in the Chinese army, friends with Li Dong and Mingyu Han.

Mingyu Han

A soldier in the Chinese army, friends with Li Dong and Longwei Gen.

Elegant Teen	A seasoned teen shaman, a feigned Chinese soldier of Mongol heritage who
Female Soldier	
(Yan/Enkhmaa)	goes by the names Yan and Enkhmaa.
Mönkhbat	Mongol leader and enemy of China.
Emperor Fa	Emperor of the great China.
Chun	

Minor Characters

Stranger	A burly figure who once confronted Junjie.
Healer	A seasoned healer responsible for treating Wang Deming.
Owner of	Teen boys with a passion for Frisbee and outdoor activities.
Frisbee and Friends	
Old Woman	Grandmother to the boy who owns the Frisbee.
Villagers	Local residents in Junjie's village.
Villager 1	
Villager 2	
Villager 3	
Villager 4	
Villager 5	
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CHAPTER 1

THE SILENT KNIGHT'S AWAKENING

In the vast expanse of the desolate desert, where the shifting sands whispered forgotten secrets, the old warrior, Ling An, trudged wearily. His footsteps left a weary trail in the scorching sand, and the mystical blade, a relic of ancient power, dragged behind him, its once-gleaming surface now tarnished with the weight of centuries. The Burden of his duty as the bearer and guardian of the mystical blade pressed heavily upon his shoulders, threatening to break his spirit. Ling An's breaths came ragged, his throat parched from the relentless sun overhead. With each step, he felt the weight of countless battles, the lives lost, and the civilizations that had risen and fallen. In a voice choked with desperation, he cried out to the gods of his ancestors, his words carried away by the wind, lost among the endless dunes. His plea echoed in the emptiness, a mournful melody that resonated with the ancient sands beneath his feet. As he fell to his knees, the unforgiving grains of sand bit into his skin, a harsh reminder of his mortality. In that moment of vulnerability, an unseen light shimmered in the distance. A flicker of ethereal brilliance cut through the suffocating haze, casting a soft glow upon the weary face of Ling An. Hope, fragile and ephemeral, glimmered in his tired eyes. It was a beacon amidst the barren landscape, a promise of guidance and solace, and a reminder that even in the harshest desert, life—no matter how faint—could still flourish.

Junjie, a teenage boy with cascading long hair, jolted awake, his eyes wide with urgency. He scrambled out of his bed, the coarse blanket slipping from his shoulders. With swift movements, he hurriedly dressed, his fingers fumbling with the fabric in his haste. The early morning sunlight seeped through the cracks in his modest room, casting a warm, golden glow over the simple furnishings.

Bounding out of his room, Junjie rushed into the main area of their home. The scent of freshly baked bread and herbs filled the air as his mother, Wang Min, moved gracefully around the kitchen, her hands expertly preparing breakfast. He greeted her in passing, his words rushed and breathless, barely audible over the sizzle of the cooking pot.

"Where are you going in such a hurry, Junjie?" his mother's voice, gentle yet concerned, cut through the morning bustle. Her eyes, the same shade as his, met his gaze, searching for answers.

Junjie hesitated for a moment, his eyes flickering with a mix of determination and restlessness. "Just need to take a walk, Māmā," he replied, his voice carrying a sense of unspoken urgency. His gaze darted towards the door, a longing etched in his young eyes. A brief silence hung between them, laden with unspoken worries and unanswered questions. Junjie looks around, "Where's Pà?" he asked. "Work, work, work!" Wang Min replied. "So early?" Junjie asked. "Yeah sweetie, you know its harvest season and your father will be really busy with lots of work" Wang Min replied. Motioning towards the door, "Okay. I just want to take a walk and feel the morning breeze" Junjie voices. Rushing out, his footsteps echoing down the narrow village path. Wang Min looks on to him, "Be safe, my dear," she said, her voice carrying both love and apprehension. "And come back home to me!" Junjie replied, "I will!" The morning sunlight bathed the world in a soft, golden hue, casting long shadows as Junjie's figure disappeared into the distance, his purpose known only to him.

In the heart of the bustling street, where the rhythm of the city pulsed with life, Junjie walked with purpose, his eyes wide with wonder and anticipation. Vehicles roared past, their engines blending into a cacophony of urban sounds. Colorful banners hung above the shops, and the scent of street food wafted through the air, tempting passersby.

Despite the vibrant surroundings, Junjie felt a pang of isolation. He tried to draw the attention of those around him, his eyes searching for a friendly face in the crowd. But the people hurried past, their gazes fixed on their own paths, their lives entwined in the tapestry of the city's chaos. Each attempt to connect was met with indifference, the world around him oblivious to his presence.

Undeterred, Junjie continued his parade down the busy street, his determination unwavering. He weaved through the crowd, his steps confident but cautious. However, fate had other plans for him that day. In a moment of misfortune, he bumped into a burly figure, his hurried pace causing a collision that sparked anger in the stranger's eyes.

"You fool!" the stranger growled, his voice a thunderous roar above the city's noise. Before Junjie could utter an apology, fists rained down upon him. Pain blossomed with each blow, and he crumpled under the assault, his cries lost amidst the urban symphony.

The onlookers, lost in their own worlds, paid little attention to the scuffle. Junjie, battered and bruised, found himself alone in the midst of the crowd, the echoes of the city's indifference ringing in his ears. As he lay on the pavement, bloodied and defeated, he clung to his resolve, a flicker of determination in his eyes. The city had shown him its harsh face, but he refused to back down. Rising slowly, he wiped away the blood, his spirit unbroken, his journey just beginning.

In the quiet confines of Junjie's room, where the soft glow of a lantern cast a warm, comforting light, Wang Min gently tended to her son's wounds. The room was adorned with tokens of Junjie's artworks — sketches of mighty warriors and ancient landscapes adorned the walls, reflecting his aspirations beyond the village's boundaries.

Wang Min's touch was tender, her fingers skilled in the art of healing. She cleaned Junjie's wounds with care, her eyes reflecting concern. "What happened, Junjie?" she asked, her voice soft as a whispering breeze. "How did you get these injuries?"

Junjie hesitated, his gaze dropping to the floor. His heart wrestled with the truth, a truth he feared would burden his mother's heart. "I... I ran into a pole; uh, slipped into a pole" he replied, grinning mischievously, his voice strained, the lie heavy on his tongue. "It was nothing, Māmā. Just, an oil spill was on the ground."

Wang Min's eyes, wise and perceptive, studied her son's face. She knew him well, sensing the turmoil within him. "Junjie," she said gently, her hand pausing in its ministrations, "you can confide in me. I've seen that look in your eyes before — the look of someone carrying a heavy secret. Whatever troubles your heart, we can face it together."

Junjie met his mother's gaze, his eyes filled with a mixture of gratitude and regret. "I promise, Māmā, it's nothing to worry about," he said, his voice soft. "I'll be more careful next time, I promise."

Wang Min continued to treat his wounds, her touch gentle yet firm. She chose not to press further, understanding the complexities of her son's world. In the quiet of the room, the unspoken truth hung heavy, a silent barrier between them, a barrier Junjie was not yet ready to breach.

In the vibrant expanse of the field, a group of five boys engaged in an enthusiastic game of Frisbee, their laughter and cheers carried by the wind. Junjie, his eyes alight with anticipation, approached them, eager to be part of the camaraderie. He greeted them with a hopeful smile, but his words hung unanswered in the air. Undeterred, he attempted to catch their attention, his gestures becoming increasingly desperate, but they remained oblivious to his presence.

The Frisbee, a plastic disc of fleeting acceptance, sailed towards Junjie, landing gracefully at his feet. In that moment, hope flickered in his eyes as he picked it up, a chance to prove himself among the boys. However, when one of the boys approached him, Junjie clung to the disc, reluctant to relinquish it. He pleaded with the boy, "Please, just let me play," his words laced with desperation, his voice cracking with vulnerability, as he clutched the Frisbee close to his chest. "I can prove I'm good enough. Just give me a chance." But the collective gaze of the group bore down on him, unyielding. The boy who owned the Frisbee sneered, his voice dripping with disdain. "You? Good enough? You're a joke, Junjie. No one wants you around."

Undeterred, Junjie's voice trembled with determination. "I can learn, I promise. I'll get better. Just let me try."

The others chimed in, their laughter mocking and cruel. "Look at him, thinking he can actually play with us. Pathetic."

But Junjie, despite the pain and humiliation, refused to yield. "I may not be perfect, but I deserve a chance just like everyone else. We're all human, aren't we? Why can't you see that?"

The boy who owned the Frisbee, his eyes narrowed with contempt, retorted, "Because you're not like us. You'll never be."

In the midst of the chaos, Junjie's voice rose above the jeers, filled with a haunting mix of sorrow and defiance. "I may not fit your idea of perfect, but you can give me a try!"

Undeterred by their dismissal, Junjie mustered his courage and hurled the Frisbee, a testament to his worthiness. But fate intervened, sending the disc soaring high into the boundless sky, disappearing into the dense woods at the edge of the field. A collective gasp escaped the boys' lips; their gazes darted skyward, searching for the lost disc. The fading light cast shadows in their eyes, obscuring the disc's trajectory.

Realization struck Junjie like a thunderclap. He knew he had to retrieve the Frisbee, his only chance at acceptance slipping away with each passing moment. He pleaded with the boys, "I... I'm very sorry I promise I'll get it back!" his voice a desperate melody, promising to find the disc and return victorious. However, his words fell on deaf ears, drowned out by the storm of anger brewing within the boy who owned the Frisbee.

Fury engulfed the boy, a wildfire burning in his eyes. With a thunderous roar, "My grandma gave me that disc and you lost it!" he lashed out at Junjie, his fists finding their mark. The other boys,

swept up in the torrent of rage, joined the assault, their blows raining down on Junjie like a merciless storm. As they beat him, their anger became a cruel symphony, drowning out Junjie's cries for mercy.

In the midst of the onslaught, Junjie's world blurred into pain and darkness, his hopes shattered like fragile glass, the bitter taste of humiliation mingling with the blood on his lips. The field, once a realm of potential friendships, became a battleground of despair, a stark reminder of the cruelty that lurked within the hearts of those he longed to call friends.

In the soft glow of the lantern, Wang Min delicately tended to Junjie's wounds, her touch gentle yet firm. Concern etched her features as she carefully cleaned the cuts and bruises, her eyes filled with maternal worry. She couldn't help but notice her son's hesitant demeanor, the way he avoided her gaze as if trying to shield her from the harsh reality.

"How did this happen, Junjie?" Wang Min asked, her voice soft, her eyes searching his face for answers.

Junjie hesitated for a moment, his eyes darting around the room as if searching for an escape from the truth. Then, with a nervous chuckle, he launched into a tale so outlandish that it bordered on the absurd.

"Well, you see, Māmā," Junjie began, his voice oddly cheerful, "I was rescuing a group of baby birds from a ferocious giant eagle! I bravely climbed a tree to reach their nest, but the eagle swooped down, and I had to wrestle it while hanging upside down!"

Wang Min raised an eyebrow, her lips twitching with a hint of amusement despite her worry. She played along, knowing that her son needed a momentary escape from the harsh realities of the world outside their home.

"A giant eagle, you say, uh?" she replied, feigning astonishment. "My, you are quite the hero, Junjie."

Junjie nodded enthusiastically, his eyes wide with mock seriousness. "Indeed, Māmā! I managed to scare the eagle away with my mighty roar! The baby birds were saved, all thanks to me!"

Wang Min couldn't suppress a smile, her heart aching with both amusement and concern. She continued tending to his wounds, letting the ridiculous tale hang in the air, unspoken acknowledgment passing between them. In that moment, she chose not to press further, allowing her son this fleeting respite from the harsh realities of the world outside. Sometimes, a touch of humor was the best bandage for the wounds that couldn't be seen.

On the desolate battleground, where the echoes of clashing swords mingled with the war cries of brave soldiers, an aura of fierce determination enveloped Captain Zhang Duiyi. His figure atop the elegant horse was a portrait of elegance amidst the chaos, his every movement a deadly dance with destiny. With swift, precise strikes, he cut down Mongol warriors, his sword a gleaming extension of his will.

Amidst the fury of battle, his sharp eyes caught sight of a figure beyond the Great Wall, a silhouette of arrogance against the horizon. It was Möngkhat, the formidable ruler of the Mongol Empire, his posture oozing confidence and pride. Zhang Duiyi's gaze hardened as he met his, his eyes mirroring Möngkhat's burning fury with a resolve that could weather any storm.

In that charged moment, a silent understanding passed between them, transcending the language of words. The clash of steel faded into the background as their eyes locked, each recognizing the formidable adversary in the other. The Great Wall, standing tall and resolute, seemed to bear witness to the clash of two unwavering spirits.

Möngkhat, undeterred by the chaos around him, his eyes, sharp as the blade of a sword, bore into Zhang Duiyi's, a silent challenge hanging between them. He raised his hand, rallying his elite troops with a commanding gesture, his aura exuding authority and power.

Zhang Duiyi's grip tightened around his sword, his resolve unbroken. He knew that this moment would define the outcome of the battle, that their silent exchange held the weight of countless lives. Captain Zhang Duiyi raised his sword, points it at Möngkhat. With a mighty battle cry, determined glint in his eyes, and a determined flick of his reins, Zhang Duiyi urged his horse forward, leading his elite troops with a grace that belied the brutality of war. His sword sliced through the air with deadly precision, his movements a testament to his skill and the weight of his responsibility. The battlefield was his canvas, and with each strike, he painted a portrait of defiance against the Mongol invaders. His target was Möngkhat.

Möngkhat's gaze followed his every move, his eyes narrowing with both respect and a thirst for conquest. The intensity of their silent exchange hung heavy in the air, a prelude to the inevitable clash between two forces of nature.

As the battle roared around them, Captain Zhang Duiyi and Möngkhat remained locked in their unspoken challenge. In that fleeting moment of connection, Zhang Duiyi and Möngkhat had exchanged more than words could convey. Their eyes reflecting the unyielding spirit of warriors destined for a battle that would echo through the annals of history.

In the soft twilight of the evening, the gentle strokes of Junjie's brush danced across the canvas, giving life to the mystical blade he had envisioned in his dreams. The room was filled with the subtle scent of paint as Wang Min, his mother, entered, her eyes curious yet tender.

Wang Min: "What are you drawing, Junjie?" she asked, her voice carrying a blend of maternal warmth and intrigue.

Junjie, his eyes sparkling with creativity, looked up and smiled. "It's a sword, Māmā. A sword I saw in my dream. It felt important, like it had a story to tell."

Their conversation flowed like a gentle stream, a mother's curiosity mingling with a son's imagination.

Wang Min: "Dreams can be mysterious, you know. What do you think this sword will represent?"

Junjie paused, his gaze thoughtful. "I'm not sure, Māmā. But I feel a connection to it, like it holds the key to something greater."

Junjie's countenance fell, "Māmā, why do the world hate me?"

Wang Min: "Why'd you say that, what makes you think the world hates you?"

Junjie: "I don't know, they just hate me, the other day I was beat..." Junjie quickly held his words, he knew he had spilled out what he holds as secret. Wang Min who heard it all pretended like she didn't. Her hand reaches for Junjie's face, "It may seem that the world hate you Junjie but I will always love you more than anything in this world."

As they continued talking, Wang Min's eyes fell upon the battle painting adorning the wall, its vibrant colors depicting a scene of both bravery and conflict. A shadow flickered in her eyes, a distant memory awakening.

Junjie, noticing the change in his mother's demeanor, asked softly, "What's wrong, Māmā? Is something bothering you?"

Wang Min hesitated for a moment, her eyes clouded with the weight of the past. "Junjie," she began, her voice laden with emotion, "Your painting, it remind me of something. The past, when the war began, the challenges we faced when you were born."

Her words hung in the air, and Junjie listened with rapt attention as Wang Min recounted the tale of their hometown consumed by conflict, of giving birth to him in the refuge of a cave, and the perilous journey that had brought them to their current home.

Junjie's voice was gentle as he asked about his grandparents, "What about grandpa and grandma?" his eyes reflecting the sadness of their shared history.

Wang Min: "Your grandparents died in the war."

Junjie: "Why did the Mongols attack, Māmā? What started all of this?"

Wang Min shook her head, her eyes filled with sorrow. "No one knows, Junjie. It's a war without reason, a darkness that has plagued our land for far too long."

Their conversation lingered in the air, a poignant reminder of the resilience they shared, the battles they had faced and the ones that lay ahead.

Wang Min, her voice soft yet firm, placed a hand on Junjie's shoulder. "Rest now, Junjie. We have faced many storms together, and we will weather this one too. Our strength lies in the love we share, in the hope for a better tomorrow."

With those words, she kissed his forehead, leaving behind a sense of reassurance that wrapped around Junjie like a comforting embrace.

Amidst the lingering smoke and the eerie silence that followed the chaos of battle, General Gang Zhou and Captain Xiu Lan stood amidst the ruins, their faces etched with determination and grief for the fallen. The remnants of the battlefield spoke of the fierce struggle that had taken place, a somber testament to the price of war.

General Gang Zhou, his eyes scanning the devastation, clenched his jaw with resolve. "Captain Xiu Lan, the Mongols may have struck a blow, but we will not falter. We will not let their aggression go unanswered. Round up soldiers, let's move out."

Captain Xiu Lan, her gaze steely, nodded in agreement. "Yes, General. We will avenge Captain Zhang Dui and his men. The Mongols will know the strength of our resolve."

As the soldiers began to regroup, their armor clinking softly in the distance, General Gang Zhou turned to Captain Xiu Lan. His voice, firm yet laden with the weight of responsibility, resonated across the battlefield.

"We cannot afford to mourn for long. Our fallen comrades deserve our vengeance, and we shall deliver it. We will march to the imperial city as one, a force that cannot be broken. Let the Mongols witness the unwavering spirit of our people, a spirit that will endure even in the face of the darkest of days."

Captain Xiu Lan met his gaze, her eyes reflecting the same unwavering determination. "They will pay for every life they've taken, General. Our unity and strength will be our greatest weapons. The Mongols will rue the day they challenged us."

With a resolute nod, General Gang Zhou raised his voice. "Soldiers, let's move out, to the imperial city." To Captain Xiu Lan he said, "Let our enemies tremble before the might of our united army. Victory belongs to those who fight with courage and honor."

And with those words, the general and his captain led their troops forward, leaving behind the smoke-shrouded battlefield. The atmosphere crackled with a palpable sense of determination, the soldiers marching forward with a shared purpose – to defend their homeland, to avenge their fallen comrades, and to show the Mongols that they were facing a force that could not be vanquished.

The doors of the throne room burst open with a thunderous echo, announcing the arrival of General Gang Zhou, Captain Xiu Lan, and their determined soldiers. The room, adorned with opulent tapestries and gilded pillars, seemed to grow even grander in the presence of the battle-worn warriors. At the center of it all, the Emperor sat on his throne, his expression a mix of concern and anticipation, with Qi Rong, his loyal aide, standing by his side.

With a deep bow, General Gang Zhou and Captain Xiu Lan paid their respects to the emperor, their eyes reflecting the gravity of the situation.

"General Gang Zhou, your report." the emperor said, his voice eerie command. Gang Zhou, his voice steady and resolute, began, "Your Majesty, the Mongols have struck a severe blow, but our spirits remain unbroken. We have assessed the damages and discussed strategies. Our resolve to defend our land burns brighter than ever."

Qi Rong, ever loyal to the Emperor, interjected, his tone cautious yet assertive. "Twenty five years of war, General Gang Zhou cannot catch Möngkhat. Your Majesty, I believe we should consider a more diplomatic approach. Negotiations might offer a chance for peace, sparing our people from further bloodshed."

General Gang Zhou, his brows furrowing in disagreement, countered, "Respectfully, Your Majesty, we have tried diplomacy before, and it has not deterred the Mongols. We need a show of strength, a united front to protect our kingdom."

Captain Xiu Lan, her eyes unwavering, added, "We propose recruiting more soldiers, bolstering our defenses, and fortifying our cities. With a stronger army, we can safeguard our borders and deter any further aggression."

The Emperor, caught between conflicting advices, took a moment to contemplate their words. His gaze shifted from Qi Rong to General Gang Zhou and Captain Xiu Lan, his decision weighing heavily on his shoulders.

After a moment of tense silence, he spoke, his voice firm with conviction, "We shall recruit more soldiers, strengthen our defenses, and stand united against the Mongol threat. For twenty five years, we've encountered Möngkhat. He's impervious to negotiation. His heart is as hardened as the devil's, impervious to reason. To converse with him is akin to speaking to deaf ears. General Gang Zhou, Captain Xiu Lan, I trust your judgment. May our combined efforts lead our kingdom to victory." He turns to Qi Rong, "You will accompany them on their quest and keep every necessary report." Qi Rong groaned, but he must obey the Emperor.

With a shared nod of agreement, the room seemed to pulse with renewed determination. The fate of their land hung in the balance, and the warriors, along with their Emperor, were prepared to face whatever challenges lay ahead, their unity a beacon of hope in the midst of uncertainty.

In the dim light of the warehouse, the scent of grains hung in the air as Wang Deming, a sturdy farmer with weathered hands, loaded bags onto his donkey cart. His face wore the familiar lines of hard work and determination. As he worked, Junjie entered, his eyes wide with anticipation, and greeted his father with a warm smile.

Junjie: "Good morning Pà, where are you going with the grains? Can I come with you?"

Wang Deming, pausing for a moment, glanced at his son, his expression a mix of concern and affection. He hesitated, searching for the right words.

Wang Deming: "I'm delivering these grains to the market, Junjie. It's hard work, and there might be dangers on the way. I don't want you to face unnecessary risks."

But Junjie, his words pouring out like a rushing river, couldn't contain his eagerness.

Junjie: "Pà, please! I want to help. I'm strong, and I promise to be careful. I can learn from you. I want to learn the ways of the land. Let me come with you, please!"

Wang Deming, moved by his son's earnestness, softened, a hint of a smile playing on his lips. He ruffled Junjie's hair affectionately, his heart swelling with pride for the determined young man before him.

Wang Deming: "Your enthusiasm is a gift, Junjie. Alright, you can come with me. But promise me you'll listen carefully and stay close. And no riding the cart, it's not safe."

Junjie: "Let me ride the cart Pà, please!"

Wang Deming, overwhelmed by his son's enthusiasm.

Wang Deming: "Oh, Junjie. Alright, you'll ride the cart."

Junjie, his face lighting up with joy, nodded vigorously.

Junjie: "Thank you, Pà! I won't let you down."

With that, father and son embarked on their journey together, the donkey cart rolling out of the warehouse, the bond between them growing stronger with each step. In that moment, Wang Deming saw not just his son but a future farmer, strong and eager to learn, ready to embrace the challenges of the land. And Junjie, filled with gratitude, followed his father, ready to prove his worth and make his family proud.

Amidst the bustling street, the clattering of hooves echoed as Junjie skillfully guided the donkey cart, his youthful exuberance fueling his determination. Grains spilling off, leaving trails on their path. Junjie's eyes gleamed with excitement as he flicked the reins expertly, the wind tousling his hair. Beside him, Wang Deming, his father, gripped the cart's edge, his face a mix of pride and worry.

Wang Deming: "Slow down, Junjie! Be careful!"

But Junjie, swept up in the thrill of the moment, reassured his father with a carefree grin.

Junjie: "Don't worry, Pà! I've got this under control. We'll be fine!"

The donkey cart surged forward, the street blurring past them. Junjie's laughter filled the air, his confidence contagious. However, in his excitement, he miscalculated a turn, and the cart collided with a market stall, sending crates of goods tumbling.

The world seemed to slow as chaos erupted around them. Wang Deming's desperate cry filled the air, his fear realized in the crash. Junjie, his jubilant expression replaced by shock, tried to regain control, but it was too late.

In the aftermath, the dust settled, revealing the consequences of their reckless speed. Wang Deming, his face etched with pain, clutched his right leg, a grimace of agony contorting his features. The bustling street fell silent as concerned onlookers gathered, their murmurs filling the air.

Wang Deming's voice, strained with pain and worry, cut through the silence.

Wang Deming: "Junjie, I told you to be careful. Look what has happened. My leg..."

Junjie, his excitement replaced by remorse, rushed to his father's side, his hands trembling.

Junjie: "I'm so sorry, Pà! I didn't mean for this to happen. Let me help you. We'll find a healer, I promise."

Wang Deming, his eyes reflecting a mix of pain and understanding, laid a gentle hand on Junjie's shoulder.

Wang Deming: "It's alright, Junjie. Accidents do happen sometimes, no one really pray for them. But remember, with excitement comes responsibility. Learn from this."

In that moment, amidst the chaos and pain, the bond between father and son grew stronger. Junjie, chastened by the accident, vowed to be more cautious, realizing the importance of his actions and their impact on the ones he loved. And as they faced the challenges ahead, they did so with a newfound understanding of the fragility of life and the strength that came from facing adversity together.

Within the confines of the command tent, illuminated by the soft glow of oil lamps, General Gang Zhou, Captain Xiu Lan, and Qi Rong huddled together, the air thick with purpose. Parchment and quills lay scattered across a makeshift table, a testament to the urgency of their task. The weight of their responsibility hung heavy in the air.

General Gang Zhou, his eyes sharp and commanding, broke the silence.

General Gang Zhou: "We need to draft a conscription notice immediately. Our provinces must rally to our cause. Every able-bodied man must be prepared to defend his homeland."

Captain Xiu Lan, her voice steady and determined, nodded in agreement. "I'll oversee the training programs. We need capable captains in each province to shape these recruits into a formidable army."

Qi Rong, his eyes flickering with a mix of loyalty and concern, interjected cautiously. "General, Captain, might I suggest we consider alternative strategies? Perhaps negotiations could still—"

General Gang Zhou, his patience waning, cut him off with a firm tone.

General Gang Zhou: "Qi Rong, negotiations have failed us before. My father died in negotiation."

Qi Rong: "But your father was rude, arrogant, impatient, hot tempered and anything negative you could imagine!"

Gang Zhou: "This is not the matter of been rude! This people cannot be reasoned with! We've lost enough, we can't take any more chances. We must be prepared for the worst. Every moment we delay, the Mongols gain ground. We need a strong, unified force."

Captain Xiu Lan, her gaze unwavering, added, "I understand your concerns, Qi Rong, but our people's safety is paramount. We cannot afford to leave anything to chance. Training our own troops is our best defense."

Qi Rong, his expression conflicted, nodded in reluctant agreement.

Qi Rong: "Very well, General, Captain. I will support your decision and assist in any way I can."

As they set to work, their quills scratched across parchment, the conscription notice taking shape under their skilled hands. In the face of their differences, a shared determination united them—a determination to defend their land, their people, and the future of their kingdom. The room hummed with purpose as they forged ahead, their combined efforts a beacon of hope amidst the looming darkness of war.

In the dim glow of the evening, Wang Deming's room was filled with a sense of subdued tension. The healer, a seasoned woman with gentle hands, carefully tended to Wang Deming's leg, her movements practiced and precise. Wang Min stood by, her eyes fixed on her husband, worry etched across her face. After the healer finished her work, she reassured Wang Min with a warm smile.

Healer: "Your husband will mend, I assure you. He's strong, and his spirit will aid in his recovery."

With those comforting words, the healer left, leaving Wang Min alone with Wang Deming. As she settled beside him, he sat up, his face clouded with frustration.

Wang Deming: "Min, I worry about Junjie. He's not like other kids. He's clumsy, always getting carried away. I fear he'll never fit in, never find his place."

Unbeknownst to them, just outside the door, Junjie stood, his young heart heavy with his father's words. He listened, his eyes glistening with unshed tears, before quietly stepping away and finding solace on a nearby bench.

Inside the room, Wang Min, her voice tender, reached out to comfort her husband.

Wang Min: "Deming, our son may face challenges, but that doesn't make him disastrous. He has a unique spirit, a resilience that will serve him well. We need to believe in him, support him, and help him find his way."

But outside, Junjie's heart ached with the weight of his father's disappointment.

Wang Min, sensing her son's turmoil, comes out, her worry deepening. She sat down beside him, her presence a silent reassurance. Junjie, his eyes searching for answers, turned to his mother.

Junjie: "Why am I like this, Māmā? Why am I always causing trouble?"

Wang Min, her voice gentle yet firm, tried to ease his pain.

Wang Min: "You are not a trouble, Junjie. You are our son, and you are special. We love you just the way you are. Everyone has their unique qualities and strengths. Your path might be different, but it doesn't mean you're destined for disaster."

But Junjie, lost in his own turmoil, couldn't find comfort in his mother's words. Ignoring her attempts to cheer him up, he got up and walks away. Junjie reached the door.

Wang Min: "Junjie." She calls her son.

Junjie: "I'm sorry Māmā, it feels like I'm never going to fit in, I'm never going to find my place. I'm nothing but disaster..."

Wang Min interrupted, "No you're not."

Junjie: "Yes, I am! (Warmly) Pà is lying down there because of me. I think I should just, stay away, less I hurt you too."

Junjie walks out seeking solace in the cool evening air, leaving Wang Min deeply concerned, her heart aching for her son's struggles.

CHAPTER 2

BEARING THE BURDEN

Beneath the flowering branches of the ancient blossom tree, Junjie stood, his young eyes fixated on his reflection in the calm waters of the pool. His gaze was heavy with self-doubt, his own image mirroring back at him, seemingly confirming his deepest fears. He felt like an outcast, an anomaly in a world that demanded conformity.

With a heavy sigh, Junjie's shoulders slumped, and he continued to stare into the water, his thoughts consumed by his perceived failures. As he wrestled with his emotions, a distant sound of hooves echoed through the air, growing louder until a lone imperial scout thundered into view. The arrival of the soldier disrupted Junjie's introspection, and he couldn't help but wonder why a representative of the Emperor had come to their humble abode.

Wang Min, sensing the gravity of the situation, stepped out to meet the imperial scout. The scout handed a scroll to Wang Min, "Message from the imperial council," he voiced, his demeanor formal and serious. Wang Min accepted the scroll with respectful gratitude.

The scout, his duty fulfilled, spurred his horse once more and rode away, leaving Wang Min to contemplate the weight of the message.

As she goes into the house, Wang Min's thoughts were drawn back to Junjie, her heart aching for her son. She could sense the burden of his own doubts. With a deep sense of understanding, Wang Min slightly looked back at Junjie, who is staring at his reflection. Her eyes conveying a mixture of love and reassurance, silently acknowledging the struggle he is facing.

Wang Min returned inside the house, leaving Junjie alone with his reflection. Junjie, still lost in his thoughts, continue staring at the troubled boy he saw in the pool. The world around him seemed to blur as he grappled with the uncertainties of his existence, his faith in himself hanging by a fragile thread. In that moment of profound vulnerability, Junjie contemplated the future, uncertain of the path that lay ahead, his young heart yearning for acceptance and understanding.

In the dim light of Wang Deming's room, the atmosphere was heavy with tension. Wang Deming carefully unrolled the scroll, his eyes scanning the contents. His face tightened as he realized the implications of the conscription notice from the imperial council. He knew he was honor-bound to comply, but Wang Min, his devoted wife, objected vehemently, her voice laced with desperation.

Wang Min: "Deming, you're wounded! You can't go out there and fight. We can't afford to lose you too."

Wang Deming, his resolve unwavering, stood firm in his decision, his eyes reflecting both determination and duty. As their argument escalated, Junjie approached the room, sensing the turmoil within his home. Hidden in the shadows, he listened, his heart heavy with guilt.

Inside the room, Wang Min's voice cracked with heartbreak, her words a plea for the preservation of their home and family.

Tears drop down her eyes as she speaks.

Wang Min: "I don't want to lose our home, Deming. I don't want to lose you. Our both parents died in battle, you've got wound in your leg, we've been deprived of our honor and respect due to Junjie's recent escapades, and right now Junjie is lost in thoughts and I'm still trying to revive him. We've already lost so much."

Outside the door, Junjie felt a deep sense of dismay. He knew he was the root cause of this conflict, his own actions leading to the impending loss his family faced. Tears welled up in his eyes as he grappled with his guilt and the pain of his family's suffering.

Inside, the argument between Wang Deming and Wang Min raged on....

Wang Deming: "If I don't go, then who will?"

...until Junjie, overwhelmed by his own sense of responsibility, mustered the courage to step forward. He gently pushed the door open, his voice quivering yet determined.

Junjie: "I will."

Wang Deming hesitated, his eyes locking onto his son's earnest gaze.

Wang Deming: "No, I can't let you go out there, it's too dangerous."

Junjie: "It's because of me you're wounded, Pà. I'm responsible for the loss of our family's honor, it is all my fault. I need to make amends. This might be my chance to prove myself, to find my place and finally fit in. Let me do this, please." Wang Min, despite her fear, saw the conviction in Junjie's eyes.

Deming adamantly refuses to allow Junjie to join the Chinese army, hurling hurtful words at him before storming off. Min, grappling with the emotional weight of the situation, follows Deming, leaving Junjie behind. Heartbroken and defeated, Junjie sinks to the floor, overcome with tears.

Deming strides into the room, his frustration evident in every step. With a heavy sigh, he collapses onto the bed, his anger still simmering beneath the surface. Min enters cautiously, her expression filled with concern as she approaches him. She settles beside him, her voice gentle as she tries to reason with him, urging him to reconsider his decision regarding Junjie. Min: "Deming, please..."

This could be Junjie's opportunity to find his purpose, to belong." Deming's jaw tightens as he listens to Min's plea, his resolve unyielding. Deming: "I've made up my mind, Min. We've been through this. I won't change it." Min's eyes glisten with unshed tears as she reaches out, her hand resting on Deming's shoulder. Min: "But he's our son... Don't you want what's best for him?" Deming's gaze flickers to Min, his expression softening momentarily before hardening once more. Deming: "I know what's best for him, and this isn't it. Please, let's not discuss this again." With a heavy heart, Min's gaze lingers on Deming's retreating form as he turns away, seeking solace in sleep. She remains seated beside him, her thoughts consumed by the weight of their disagreement, unsure of how to mend the growing divide between them.

Under the vast expanse of the night sky, the Mongol camp was alive with fervor and revelry. Mongol soldiers, their faces etched with triumph, gathered around makeshift tables, toasting to their impending victory against China. Laughter and camaraderie filled the air as they charted out their conquests in advance, their voices rising in a crescendo of jubilation.

Amidst the celebration, Möngkhat, a commanding presence with steely determination in his eyes, sat with his elite men around a crackling fire. In the flickering glow, he used a sharp sword to draw their battle plans onto the ground, his movements precise and calculated. His voice, resonating with authority, cut through the night as he outlined their strategies, his words laced with confidence.

Möngkhat: "Tomorrow, we step into China. Our victory against Captain Zhang Duyi was just the beginning. We have planned, we have strategized, and now we march forward. This land will be ours, and China will tremble before the might of the Mongols!"

His words hung in the air, carrying the weight of their impending invasion. With a fierce determination burning in his eyes, Möngkhat rose to his feet, his silhouette imposing against the backdrop of the night. He turned to his troops, his voice booming with authority, commanding their attention.

Möngkhat: "Celebrate tonight, for tomorrow we make history! Raise your voices, raise your spirits! Let the world know that the Mongols have arrived, and nothing will stand in our way!"

His rallying cry echoed across the camp, fueling the soldiers' fervor. The night was alive with the fervent anticipation of conquest, as the Mongols prepared to step into the heart of China, their spirits aflame with the promise of victory and glory.

In the soft glow of the morning light, Junjie stood at the threshold of his home, his heart heavy with both fear and determination. Wang Min, her eyes brimming with unshed tears, approached him with a weathered sack slung over her shoulder. She handed it to Junjie, her hands trembling slightly.

Wang Min: "Take this, Junjie. It carries the warmth of our home and the hope of our hearts. May it shield you from harm and guide you back to us."

Junjie accepted the sack, his fingers brushing against his mother's in a fleeting, tender moment. His gaze met hers, a silent understanding passing between them. Wang Deming, his father, stood nearby, his stern facade softened by the overwhelming pride he felt for his son.

Wang Deming: "You make us proud, Junjie. Remember your courage and the love that surrounds you. Let it be your armor on the battlefield."

With a deep breath, Junjie embraced his parents, his arms wrapping around them tightly as if trying to absorb their strength. The air was thick with emotion, the unspoken words of love and worry hanging in the air. As they parted, tears glistened in Wang Min's eyes, and Wang Deming's voice wavered with unshed emotions.

Wang Deming: "Come back to us, Junjie. Our hearts will be with you, wherever you go."

Junjie, his voice filled with determination, nodded, his eyes reflecting his parents' love and the newfound strength he had found within himself.

Junjie: "I will, Māmā, Pà. I'll return, and our family will be whole once more."

With a final, lingering gaze, Junjie turned away, his steps carrying him toward the uncertain future that awaited him on the battlefield. His parents watched him leave, their hearts heavy with both fear for his safety and pride in his bravery. As he disappeared from their view, they sniveled, their silent prayers accompanying him on his journey, their love a beacon guiding him through the trials that lay ahead.

In the unforgiving embrace of nature, Junjie persevered, his determination undeterred by the harsh elements that surrounded him. The relentless sun beat down upon him, its scorching rays casting shadows upon his weary face. Undeterred, he pressed on, his eyes fixed on the distant horizon, a beacon guiding him through the vast expanse of rugged mountains.

The landscape, once serene, was now transformed by nature's fury. Freezing snowfall descended from the heavens, painting the world around him in a blanket of white. Junjie's breath hung in the frigid air as he trudged forward, each step a testament to his resilience against the biting cold.

Amidst the relentless onslaught, heavy rainfall drenched the earth, turning the path ahead into a muddy quagmire. Junjie's boots sank into the mire with each step, yet he marched forward undeterred, his determination casting aside the discomfort and weariness that threatened to weigh him down.

The landscape stretches endlessly before Junjie, a vast expanse of untouched snow blanketing the earth in a serene white embrace. With each step, he trudges through the pristine powder, the cold seeping into his bones with every crunch of snow beneath his feet. Suddenly, his foot slips on an icy patch, sending him tumbling down a small embankment and into the frigid embrace of an icy stream below. The shock of the icy water steals his breath away, sending a shiver through his body as he struggles to regain his footing. For a moment, time seems to stand still as Junjie fights against the numbing cold, his breath forming wisps of fog in the crisp winter air. With trembling limbs, he manages to pull himself out of the icy water, his teeth chattering as he huddles on the snowy bank, desperately seeking warmth in the midst of the wintry landscape.

Through sun, snow, and rain, Junjie's spirit remained unbroken. His journey was a test of endurance, a trial by nature's wrath. Yet, with every step, he drew strength from the challenges he faced. His resolve remained unyielding, a beacon of hope cutting through the tempestuous weather, guiding him ever closer to the army encampment where his fate awaited. In the face of nature's fury,

Junjie emerged as a symbol of unwavering determination, a testament to the human spirit's ability to overcome even the harshest of adversities.

Perched on the mountains, Junjie unfolded his conscription notice, his brow furrowed in confusion as he scanned the document once again. He was certain he had arrived at the designated location, yet there was no sign of the army encampment he had expected to find. Perplexed, he glanced around, his eyes searching the horizon for any indication of the camp's whereabouts.

His attention was abruptly diverted by a rustle in the nearby bushes. Fear gripped him; he cautiously approached, wielding a stick as a makeshift weapon. With trembling hands, he brushed aside the foliage, only to discover an unexpected sight—a raccoon, its fur adorned with leaves, gazed back at him with an amused expression.

Raccoon: "Hey, don't you have a Mama!? I'm bathing here, people!"

Startled and somewhat embarrassed, Junjie quickly averted his gaze. However, curiosity got the better of him, and he couldn't resist stealing another glance. To his astonishment, the raccoon had vanished from the bush. A moment later, a voice called out from behind him.

Raccoon: "Looking for me?"

Junjie turned to find the raccoon now standing behind him, its eyes glinting with mischief. Bewildered, he asked how the raccoon had managed to move so swiftly.

Junjie: "How'd you do that?"

Raccoon: "I've got some impressive hide-and-seek skills, you know. What are you doing here in my territory, kid?"

Junjie: "Territory?"

Raccoon: "Yeah, my territory... (The raccoon eyes Junjie suspiciously) I got paws and claws! (Extends its claws menacingly)."

Junjie: "You might want to keep those claws, 'cause I'm just passing through. I'm looking for the Chinese army camp."

The raccoon retracts its claws.

Raccoon: "Are you a Pizza guy?!"

Junjie: "No."

Raccoon: "A Hotdog guy?!"

Junjie: "No."

Raccoon: "A Jian Bing guy?!"

Junjie: "No!"

Raccoon: "(annoyed) Then what are you?!"

Junjie: "(proudly) I am, a trooper."

The raccoon gazes at Junjie, its left eyebrow lifting in skepticism.

Raccoon: "Really?"

Junjie: "Yes, here's my conscription notice."

Junjie hands the conscription notice to the raccoon, who takes it with a hint of curiosity.

Raccoon: "Let's see what we have here."

Junjie: "You read?"

Raccoon: "I'm a pro."

The raccoon examines the conscription notice.

Raccoon: "So why are you doing this, kid?"

Junjie: "I've been called on by the Emperor to join the imperial army to fight against the Mongols."

Raccoon: "Monkeys."

Junjie: "No, Mongols."

Raccoon: "Yeah, monkeys!"

Junjie rolls his eyes.

Raccoon: "So you're fighting monkeys. I love monkeys! They are... (the raccoon kisses its fingers in a chef's gesture) yummy!"

Junjie: "(in disgust) you eat monkeys?"

Raccoon: "They are yummy! You want some? (Abruptly, the raccoon transforms into a chef, complete with a chef's hat and holding miniature utensils) How'd you want it? Fries, roasted, baked, boiled, or raw?!"

Junjie: "(in disgust) I don't want any."

Raccoon: "Oh. (The raccoon puts away the chef attire) So, what do you want kid?"

Junjie: "I want to join the army to defend China against the Mongols."

Raccoon: "(calls Junjie) come closer, kid."

Junjie approaches the raccoon, kneeling down to be at eye level. The raccoon grabs Junjie's arms, feeling his muscles, and bursts into laughter. Junjie looks confused.

Raccoon: "How're you going to fight your monkeys with those skinny muscles of yours?!" Continues laughing, rolling on the ground. Junjie wears a sad expression but remains determined. He gets up.

Junjie: "(determined) I know I can do it."

Raccoon: "Oh, you're serious kid. Okay, if you really want to do this, I'm in! 'cause I love monkeys! Come on, kid!"

As the raccoon marches away, Junjie interrupts.

Junjie: "There's a little problem."

Raccoon: "Problem? I don't like that."

Junjie: "(scratches his head) I don't know the exact way to the army's camp."

Raccoon: "Bummer. But no worries kid! I do know the army's camp."

Junjie: "You do?!"

Raccoon: "Yeah, but before I show you, you will have to undergo a series of trainings."

Junjie: "Trainings?"

Raccoon: "Yeah."

Junjie: "What trainings?"

The raccoon runs to a tree, now dressed in army attire with a miniature sword. The raccoon rolls down a scroll hung on a tree.

Raccoon: "The monkeys are formidable, menacing creatures."

The raccoon's eyes widened dramatically as it described the monkeys, hands shading its eyes like a lookout in search of the mythical creatures. Junjie, intrigued, knelt down to meet the raccoon at eye level, absorbing every word with wide-eyed curiosity.

Raccoon: "(in a hushed tone) these monkeys, they have eyes that glow in the dark, chattering teeth that keep me sleepless at nights."

Junjie leans in closer, his eyes reflecting a mix of fascination and apprehension.

Raccoon: "(whispering) they got fur that changes colors, more sophisticated than chameleons. They are teleportation machines; they teleport with their tails. You can't catch them!"

Junjie, now entranced, imagines the elusive creatures darting around with the swish of their tails.

Raccoon: "(lowering its voice conspiratorially) they have mischievous powers to turn objects into bananas. I once ate a banana unknowingly that it was a frog turned into a banana. It kept croaking in my belly!"

Junjie's eyes widen, a mix of horror and amusement as he envisions the bizarre scenario.

Raccoon: "They've got super stretchy limbs, kid! They can stretch to a coconut tree without climbing it."

Junjie mimics stretching his own limbs in amazement, mirroring the elongation of the mythical monkeys.

Raccoon: "And they wield giant banana bunches, enough to satisfy my belly for years. I tried stealing one, but I ended up breaking my finger in the process. Oh no, my manicure! (Fake crying)"

Junjie stifles a chuckle at the racoon's dramatic performance.

Raccoon: "(sniffing) now, to defeat them, you must be strong, brave, and resilient!"

The raccoon's, suddenly composed, gives Junjie a solemn nod, as if passing on the sacred knowledge of monkey-defeating prowess.

Junjie: "Okay! Uh, excuse me, you got a name or something?"

Raccoon: "My name?"

Junjie: "Yes, your name."

Raccoon: "Oh my name... Uh..., what's my name? (Scratching its head) I can't remember. Yeah! Call me Captain Raccamoto!"

Junjie: "Racco—tomato?"

Raccamoto: "Yeah, I love tomatoes. It's 'Raccamoto', just do away with the first 'to'."

Junjie: "Okay, Captain Ra—cco—mato. Still trying to memorize it. I'm Wang Junjie."

Raccamoto: "Wang Junkie."

Junjie: "No, Junjie."

Raccamoto: "That's nice, kid, Junkie it is! (Junjie rolls his eyes) Now, back to our training."

Raccamoto goes to a banana tree.

Raccamoto: "Come over, kid."

Junjie comes over.

Raccamoto: "Your first training, mission (thinking)... Training, mission..., whichever one! Shake this tree!"

Junjie: "Shake the tree?"

Raccamoto: "(solemnly) yes."

Junjie begins to shake the banana tree.

Raccamoto: "(sternly) harder!"

With a swift and practical motion, Junjie shakes the tree vigorously. Banana cascade down in response.

Raccamoto: "(eating a banana, mouth full) you got it, kid! Mission completed! Now your second mission, training... (Raccamoto brings out a big basket)... Gather veggie tomatoes."

Junjie: "Tomatoes?"

Raccamoto: "Yeah, kid. Hurry up, (yelling) we got a war to prepare for!"

Junjie hurries to the nearby bush, ready to fulfill the whimsical request. In a swift and practiced motion, he plucked tomatoes, filling the basket rapidly.

Junjie, beaming with pride, returns to Raccomato, who is now seated on the basket filled with tomatoes.

Raccomato: "(munching on a banana) nice job, kid! You got it! Now, for your third training mission, kid, show me some push-ups."

Junjie, ever eager to prove himself, salutes with an earnest expression.

Junjie: "(salutes) Yes, Duìzhǎng!"

He drops to the ground, his push-ups punctuated by determined grunts. Raccomato continues to munch on a banana adding tomato to spice it up, occasionally tossing one to Junjie as a peculiar reward for each successful push-up.

The scene unfolds with a blend of playfulness and determination, as Junjie continues his push-ups with a mixture of effort and enthusiasm.

Each banana and tomato tossed by Raccomato serves as both a snack and a motivational treat.

The sun dipped below the horizon, casting a warm glow on the mountain. Raccomato, now contentedly stuffed with tomatoes, reclined on the ground, rubbing its round belly.

Raccomato: "(content) Ah, the joys of a well-earned meal. Kid, you're doing great with those push-ups!"

Junjie, however, lay on the ground, panting and exhausted.

Junjie: "(between breaths) Captain... when do we... get to the army camp?"

Raccomato: "(thoughtful) Soon, kid. But first, the toll. Twenty cowry shells."

Junjie: "Twenty cowry shells?! What are you even going to do with it?"

Raccomato: "(silly) my manicure!"

Reluctantly, Junjie handed over the sack of cowry shells, wondering if this quirky raccoon had any real plan.

Raccomato: "(grinning) Excellent, my resourceful kid! Now, let's descend the mountain!"

As they descended, Raccomato, using its cane, regaled Junjie with more jokes about monkeys, each tale more absurd than the last. Junjie couldn't help but laugh, the weight of his worries momentarily forgotten in the camaraderie of the moment.

Its witty banter lightening the atmosphere despite the confusion that still surrounded Junjie. With each jest and question, Junjie found himself momentarily forgetting his worries, drawn into the raccoon's whimsical world.

Raccomato: "(grinning) Laughter is good for the soul, kid! Now, let me tell you about the time I challenged banana tree to a dance-off..."

As Junjie and Raccomato descend the mountain, the sunset casts a surreal glow on their journey. Junjie, caught in the infectious joy of Raccomato's antics, forgets the weight of his worries for a while.

As Junjie and Raccamoto approach the camp, Junjie's nerves become palpable. Raccamoto, sensing Junjie's anxiety, performs a series of comical stretches and twirls, all the while offering encouraging words.

Raccamoto: "Come on, kid! You're about to embark on a grand adventure! Look at me, I'm practically doing cartwheels."

Raccamoto executes an exaggerated cartwheel, drawing a few curious glances from passersby. Junjie, despite his anxiety, can't help but chuckle at Raccamoto's antics.

Raccamoto: "(whispering) you got this, kid! Just remember, a confident trooper always catches the worm... or something like that."

As they near the camp entrance, Raccamoto, with a mischievous grin, decides to play the part of a stowaway. With surprising agility, he hops into Junjie's sack bag and peeks out, his eyes gleaming with mischief.

Raccamoto: "(whispering) Surprise! I'm your secret weapon, hidden in plain sight. Now, let's go make some history, or at least a good story to tell!"

Junjie, now amused and motivated by Raccamoto's antics, takes a deep breath, ready to step into the bustling camp and face whatever challenges await him.

Junjie steps into the makeshift camp nestled within a village. His eager grin gradually fading as the soldiers gaze at him with a mix of curiosity and indifference. Raccamoto, hidden in the sack, continues his silly banter, providing some comic relief amidst the growing tension.

Raccamoto: "(whispering) Chin up, kid! You've got this. Just think of it as a stroll in a banana grove."

As Junjie moves forward, his nervousness escalates. The camp, initially a bustling center of activity, seems to hush into an eerie silence as soldiers glance at him, their expressions ranging from mild amusement to complete disinterest.

Raccamoto: "(whispering) They are just testing your sense of humor, Junjie. Show 'em what you've got!"

In his attempt to blend in, Junjie accidentally bumps into an enigmatic figure, Li Dong, who's chatting with his friends Mingyu Han and Longwei Gen. Li Dong, usually reserved, seems to be having a bad day. His reaction is swift and aggressive, grabbing Junjie by the collar. The soldiers observing the scene share glances, unsure of how to react.

Mingyu Han, a conciliator among them, swiftly intervenes, trying to ease the brewing tension.

Mingyu Han: "Easy, Dong. No need for trouble."

Li Dong reluctantly releases Junjie, but just as the situation appears to settle, Raccomato, unable to resist the temptation, delivers an inappropriate joke about Li Dong. Li Dong overhears it, his anger reignited once more. Li Dong throws a punch at Junjie, who miraculously manages to dodge, avoiding further escalation.

Raccomato: "(whispering) Oops, my bad! Maybe next time keep the jokes PG."

As the chaos ensues, Mingyu Han struggles to maintain order, Raccomato continues with his absurdity.

Raccomato: "(whispering) I should probably consider a career in stand-up."

Junjie, still nervous and now on edge, unknowingly triggers a series of mishaps. He stumbles over equipment, accidentally knocking down a stack of crates, creating a domino effect of chaos throughout the camp.

Raccomato: "(whispering) Well, that escalated quickly! At least they're getting their daily workout chasing you, kid."

The once-bustling camp transforms into a chaotic scene. Soldiers scramble to contain the unruly situation, while villagers join the pursuit, yelling and rushing after Junjie. Mingyu Han, frustrated and stepping aside, watches the chaos unfold. In the midst of the commotion, Junjie, desperate to escape the growing mob, inadvertently wrecks the village further.

As the chaos reaches its peak, the villagers finally corner Junjie, pinning him to the ground. A collective fury builds among them as they prepare to unleash their frustration on him...

Just as a collective blow is about to fall, the atmosphere freezes. The commanding figures of General Gang Zhou, Captain Xiu Lan, and Qi Rong emerge from a nearby tent. Their stern expressions match the gravity of the situation, bringing an abrupt halt to the impending violence. The camp falls into an uneasy silence, awaiting the leaders' judgment.

The villagers hastily rise, leaving Junjie sprawled on the ground. Raccomato, hidden in the sack, whispers a silly joke, adding a moment of humor to the tense atmosphere.

Junjie: "(whispering) Shhhh..."

General Gang Zhou strides forward, his gaze piercing through the chaos, demanding an explanation from the nervous Junjie, who stammers through his response.

Gang Zhou, a commanding presence, extends his hand, seeking Junjie's conscription notice. The general meticulously inspects the document, his expression unreadable. The villagers, caught in the aftermath, watch anxiously as Gang Zhou returns the notice to Junjie.

The air is thick with tension as Gang Zhou addresses the villagers.

Gang Zhou: "Now, you've had your daily workout chasing rats. You'll spend the rest of the evening cleaning up.

Junjie, his brow furrowing in defiance. "I am no rat," he mutters under his breath, his voice carrying a hint of indignation.

Gang Zhou: "(To Junjie, with stern authority) Clean up this mess, pitch your tent, and go to sleep."

Junjie's eyes flicker with a hint of rebellion. "But sire, it's just twilight," he protests.

Gang Zhou: "(solemnly) I say go to sleep."

Junjie ultimately acquiesce with a subtle nod of his head.

General Gang Zhou, Captain Xiu Lan, and Qi Rong retreat into their respective tents, leaving the villagers to grapple with the aftermath of the chaotic encounter.

The villagers surround Junjie, compelling him to rectify the chaos he inadvertently caused. With watchful eyes, they oversee every motion as Junjie diligently cleans up the remnants of the chaotic encounter.

As Junjie finishes his task, the villagers disperse, retreating to their homes, while the troopers retreat to their tents. Junjie, left alone in the fading light, is joined by Raccomato, emerging from the sack with a stretch.

Raccomato: "I've spent a long day playing baseball!"

Together, they embark on the task of building their tent, weaving through the canvas and poles.

In the quiet twilight, Raccomato disrupts the solemn atmosphere with a boisterous, hilarious joke. Soldiers poke their heads out of their tents, curious about the commotion. In a swift motion, Raccomato conceals himself, leaving Junjie awkwardly grinning in the spotlight. The soldiers, amused but indifferent, return to their tents. Junjie furrowed at Raccomato.

Raccomato: "(clutching mouth) Oops!"

With the tent finally erected, Raccomato continues to whisper jokes, this time about the soldiers, as Junjie, uncertain of his place in this new environment, enters the tent. The night settles over the camp, marking the beginning of Junjie's journey within the ranks of the imperial army.

The morning sun casts its warm glow on a tent, conspicuously placed amidst the orderly rows of other tents – it's Junjie's. Inside, Junjie remains blissfully asleep, oblivious to the unfolding day. The tranquil atmosphere is suddenly disrupted as Raccomato employs an unconventional method

to rouse him. With a swift motion, Raccomato brushes Junjie's mouth and proceeds to feed him, an amusing and unexpected wake-up call.

Startled, Junjie awakens, momentarily disoriented as he glances around. The familiarity of his surroundings slowly registers, and the realization that he's in the army's camp dawns upon him. Swiftly, he gets up, an urgency evident in his movements.

As Junjie hastily dresses, a comical sight unfolds. Raccomato, donned in a makeshift shower attire, is preparing for a shower of its own.

Raccomato: "Why are you rushing kid? Relax...!"

Junjie: "I'm late. The General is so going to kill me. Where are my shoes?!"

Raccomato: "Oh, they decided to play hide-and-seek! Found them in the shoe rebellion, lacing up a revolution!"

Junjie spots his shoes, and in a mix of urgency and amusement, he hastily puts them on, hopping on one leg as he rushed out in a comical attempt to navigate the situation. Junjie leaves Raccomato behind, adding a touch of humor to the start of the day with the bustling camp.

General Gang Zhou, Captain Xiu Lan and Qi Rong stands before a great rank.

General Gang Zhou: "Soldiers, today marks a journey into the unknown."

He strides back and forth, his voice carrying the weight of the impending quest. While Gang Zhou speaks, Junjie attempts to sneak into the line. Gang Zhou notices a vacant space in the line but continues his address without acknowledging it. In the background, Junjie subtly maneuvers into the ranks, catching Gang Zhou's attention. However, the general maintains his focus on addressing the troops.

General Gang Zhou: "Today, we march toward destiny, toward the challenges that will shape our legacy. Each step we take will echo in the annals of history. We march not just as soldiers but as architects of our fate."

Having said this, the General gives a stern command.

General Gang Zhou: "Everyone pack up! We're leaving."

Junjie, now seamlessly integrated into the formation, seizes an opportune moment to question the destination.

Junjie: "Where are we heading, General?"

General Gang Zhou: "(fixing his gaze on Junjie) To a land that will unveil itself as we tread upon it."

As the soldiers prepare to move out, Li Dong shoots Junjie a piercing look, and Junjie, feeling the weight of scrutiny, nervously diverts his gaze.

Junjie bursts into his tent, finding Raccomato in an unexpected bath-time comedy routine with an oversized and miniature bath brushes.

Raccomato: "(scrubbing back) Why are you in a rush kid?"

Junjie: "We're leaving, now."

Raccomato: "(in a soapy daze) Leaving? Already? I was just getting cozy in this luxurious bathing ceremony."

Junjie rolls his eyes as Raccomato continues scrubbing with exaggerated enthusiasm. Suddenly, Raccomato throws the brushes away. The bath brushes are airborne, they hit the tent pole and chaos ensues as the tent collapses in a soapy spectacle, enveloping them both.

Junjie groan in frustration.

The soldiers embarked on an arduous journey. General Gang Zhou, Captain Xiu Lan, Qi Rong, Li Dong, Longwei Gen, Mingyu Han, and other soldiers traverse the terrain, mounted on their horses. In stark contrast, Junjie with other soldiers forges on foot. Li Dong and Longwei Gen take the opportunity to mock Junjie, their taunts carried by the wind.

Li Dong: "Look at him, walking like he's on a leisurely stroll!"

Longwei Gen: "Can't keep up with the real troopers, huh? Come sit on my horse tail!"

Li Dong and Longwei Gen burst into laugh.

Inside the sack bag, Raccomato retaliates with whispered jokes about Li Dong and Longwei Gen, adding a touch of humor to the journey.

Raccomato: "(whispering) Those two must have taken a course in being obnoxious. I bet their horses roll their eyes when they ride."

Junjie: "I bet too. Just ignore them, Duìzhǎng, Let them laugh all they want."

Their journey forges ahead day and night. The soldiers are seen silhouetted against the mountain's crest, their weary figures pressed forward. In the relentless march, a heavy rain descended upon them one night, compelling the soldiers to seek refuge in a cave. A feeble fire flickered in their midst, casting dancing shadows on the damp walls.

As they navigated through unforgiving terrains, Junjie stumbled into the mud, a misstep that invited the laughter and mockery of Li Dong and Longwei Gen. The echo of their disdain lingered, carried by the biting wind as the soldiers trudged through the snow-covered landscape.

In the bustling village market, Wang Deming navigates his donkey cart through the crowd, his face reflecting the fatigue of recent events. Villagers approach him, airing their grievances about the chaos caused by Junjie. The complaints swirl around him, a chorus of discontent.

Villager 1: "(complaining) That son of yours wreaked havoc in my backyard!"

Villager 2: "(murmuring) My chickens are still squawking from the scare he gave them."

Villager 3: "(angrily) Your boy knocked over my vegetable cart! I lost half my produce!"

Villager 4: "(shouting) My laundry was hanging out to dry, and he trampled all over it!"

An old woman walking pass Wang Deming with her cane.

Old woman: "Your boy lost the Frisbee I got for my grandson."

Villager 5: "(exasperated) I just planted those flowers, and now they're scattered all over the place!"

Despite Wang Deming's attempts to apologize and explain, the villagers continue expressing their frustration, their voices forming an indistinct hum in the marketplace.

Villager 6: "(yelling) Your son bumped into me and broke my finger!"

The chorus of complaints grows louder, creating a cacophony of discontent around Wang Deming. Each villager seems to have a tale of disruption caused by Junjie's recent escapades. Wang Deming, burdened by the weight of these grievances, moves through the market with a heavy heart.

At sunset, in the serene valley, General Gang Zhou, with a commanding gesture tells the soldiers to stop.

Gang Zhou: "We're staying here. Pitch your tents and go get some sleep, tomorrow our training begins."

The soldiers start to pitch their tents, and Junjie, amidst the rhythmic sounds of pegs hitting the ground, erects his shelter. Raccomato, nestled in the sack bag, weaves a symphony of jokes that dances with the soft rustling of the wind.

Raccomato: "(whispering) Why don't horses ever argue in the military?"

Junjie, amidst laughter and hammering, hesitates.

Junjie: "Um, I don't know!"

Raccomato: "Because they follow the neigh-sayer! (Raccomato chuckles)"

Gang Zhou pitching his tent sees Junjie laughing, he wondered.

As the sun descends, the valley echoes with hammering, the camaraderie of soldiers being stitched together through shared moments and the threads of war.

Heavy rain pans on the roof of Wang Deming's house, thunder hooves echoing through the night sky.

Wang Deming sitting on his bed, dismayed, still bearing the weight of his son's actions. Wang Min, sensing Wang Deming's distress, enters the room. She looks at him with concern.

Wang Min: "What's troubling you, Deming?"

Wang Deming: "(sighing heavily) It's about Junjie, all the villagers are complaining about him due to some chaos he caused them." Wang Min, with a comforting smile, responds.

Wang Min: "Our son may be spirited and seems disastrous, but remember, he carries the resilience of our family. We'll face this together. I just pray he's alright where ever he is."

CHAPTER 3

UNSEEN FORCES

As the first light of dawn painted the sky, the disciplined ranks of soldiers gathered, ready to embark on the ancient Chinese rituals of training. General Gang Zhou's authoritative voice cut through the quiet, outlining a series of exercises deeply rooted in the rich tapestry of their martial heritage.

The morning commenced with the fluid movements of Qi Gong stances, a dance that intertwined breath and motion, weaving strength into the very fabric of their beings.

Transitioning seamlessly, the soldiers delved into the art of Jianzi, skillfully using their legs to keep a weighted shuttlecock airborne—a delicate yet powerful display of balance and leg strength.

The rhythmic thud of darts meeting targets echoed through the training grounds, testing the soldiers' accuracy and refining their hand-eye coordination with each well-aimed throw.

In a symphony of endurance, they assumed the horse stance, a grueling test of leg strength that mirrored the challenges of the battlefields they would face.

The morning culminated in the mesmerizing swirls of Tai Chi sword forms—a dance of precision and elegance, each movement a testament to the mastery of both body and blade.

Yet, amid this symphony of disciplined warriors, Junjie struggled to find his rhythm. General Gang Zhou's disappointment rang loud as he suggested Junjie's unsuitability for the life of a soldier. The taunts from Li Dong and Longwei Gen added salt to the wounds, propelling Junjie to flee the training grounds, leaving Captain Xiu Lan to observe with a twinge of sympathy, a lone note of discord in the otherwise harmonious training melody.

As the moon cast a gentle glow over the camp, Junjie sat within the confines of his tent, his spirit heavy with the weight of perceived failure. Raccomato, ever the resilient companion, attempted to lift Junjie's spirits with a whimsical joke, but the somber atmosphere persisted.

Junjie: "(sadly) I don't think I'm ever going to fit in."

Raccomato: "Of course you are, kid. You're going to fit in someday—somehow. (A slight sob punctuates his words)."

Junjie: "I doubt."

Raccomato, undeterred, threw a joke into the air, hoping to catch a hint of laughter from Junjie, but the young trooper remained enveloped in his despondency.

Junjie: "Have you ever felt like you don't fit in?"

Raccomato: "(warmly) Yeah, many times, when I had my family. They didn't honor me; we got a band of jokers, I always dreamed of been among, at least get audited or something. But no one wanted to listen to my jokes. They thought I wasn't good enough."

Junjie: "(compassionately, offering a warm smile) You have one now, I love to listen to your jokes, it has made our journey unexpectedly delightful. (Raccomato smiles) Why'd you leave your family, anyway? Didn't you want them?"

Raccomato turned his face away, lowering his head.

Raccomato: "My family... I lost them— to some— nasty barbarians."

Junjie: "Barbarians?"

Raccomato: "They hunted my family for dinner."

Junjie: "Dinner? People eat raccoons?"

Raccomato assumed a theatrical stance, vividly portraying the ominous figures that lurked beyond the mountains.

Raccomato: "Very well, you could imagine that. These are not people; they are nefarious beasts! (He acted out their sinister presence with helmets, swords, spears, and menacing armor. Junjie chuckled at Raccomato's theatrics.) They got this... they got this ominous leader..."

Junjie: "Ominous leader? Sinister presence? Do you think it's the Mongols?"

Raccomato: "You mean your monkeys?"

Junjie: "Yes. You know their camp?"

Raccomato: "Beyond these mountains, just a two days journey."

Junjie: "Can you show it to me?"

Raccomato: "Really?"

Junjie: "Yes, I want to check them out; they could be the Mongols."

Raccomato: "(stretching out his hand) Fifty cowry shells."

Junjie: "Fifty!?"

Raccomato: "Yeah, I've got to stock up for a two days journey!"

Junjie reluctantly hands him the shells.

Junjie: "This is five cowry shells."

Raccomato: "Five!? You can't use five cowry shells as an advance payment!"

Junjie reluctantly gives him an extra twenty cowry shells.

Junjie: "I'll give you the rest when the job is done. (Junjie extends his hand for a shake) Deal?"

Raccomato suspiciously eyes Junjie's hand and eyes, then shakes him.

Raccomato: "Deal."

A sense of shared determination lingered through their minds, awaiting the journey to the unknown.

Amidst the morning sun casting a golden hue over the training ground, the rhythmic sounds of soldiers engaged in drills filled the air. General Gang Zhou, with a stern countenance, observed their efforts, while Qi Rong diligently recorded notes in a small ledger. In the disciplined routine, Captain Xiu Lan traversed the area, her gaze searching for a familiar face.

Xiu Lan, her brows furrowed, approached General Gang Zhou.

Xiu Lan: "General, have you seen Junjie?"

Gang Zhou's response was devoid of its usual warmth.

Gang Zhou: "No sign of him. Perhaps, he has gone home."

A flicker of concern passed over Xiu Lan's face as she shot Gang Zhou an unfriendly look before turning away, troubled by the unexplained absence of the young soldier.

As the days unfolded, a narrative mosaic emerged, weaving together the parallel threads of Junjie's journey and the events transpiring back at the military camp and his home.

On one side of the divided screen, Junjie and Raccomato pressed on, relentless in their pursuit. From the scorching rays of the sun to the chilling darkness of the night, their journey persisted. The ever-changing weather mirrored the challenges they faced — an odyssey marked by determination etched on their faces.

Simultaneously, the military camp pulsed with activity. Soldiers engaged in rigorous training under the watchful eyes of General Gang Zhou and the diligent notes of Qi Rong. Captain Xiu Lan, usually composed, wore a furrowed brow, signaling an undercurrent of concern.

Meanwhile, in the quiet haven of Junjie's home, the night unveiled Wang Min's worry. Her face, bathed in the soft glow of the lantern, conveyed the maternal anxiety that lingered as she pondered her son's whereabouts. The scenes unfolded in a synchronized dance, painting a vivid picture of the interconnected lives tied to Junjie's journey.

As Junjie stood on the precipice of the hill, the vast snow-covered valley sprawled beneath him like a canvas of untouched purity. The air was crisp, and the quietude of the landscape resonated with the anticipation of the impending adventure.

Junjie, eyes gleaming with determination, turned to Raccomato, who was theatrically feigning exhaustion. Raccomato staggered, collapsing onto the snowy ground, his performance adding a touch of levity to the serious moment.

Junjie, not one to be deterred by theatrics, urged his companion to witness the breathtaking sight below.

Junjie: "(looking over the valley) You need to check this out, Duizhǎng."

Raccomato: "Yeah, yeah, yeah, we're almost there, just down the valley."

Junjie, undeterred, insisted they embark on their descent.

Junjie: "C'mon Duizhǎng, let's do this!"

Raccomato, mustering the last bit of energy, wearily rose to his feet.

Junjie, fueled by excitement and a hint of bravado, couldn't resist a battle cry.

Junjie: "(excited) Alright, you slimy monkeys, prepare to meet your ancestors!"

With that declaration, Junjie leaped off the edge, descending into the snowy abyss. Raccomato, perhaps with less enthusiasm but equal determination, wearily followed suit, both rolling down the hill slope towards their awaited challenge.

Under the cloak of night, the Mongol camp lay shrouded in an eerie stillness. Roughly arranged tents painted a chaotic picture, with soldiers parading, conversing, and indulging in various activities around fires. Junjie and Raccomato, hidden behind bushes, meticulously crafted a strategy for infiltrating the camp. Raccomato, true to form, supplied a stream of comical advice, providing both levity and absurdity to their serious mission.

Taking measured steps, they cautiously entered the camp, threading through the chaos. Each move was a dance with danger; at every turn, they narrowly avoided discovery. Junjie and Raccomato melded with the shadows, silently observing the Mongol soldiers.

Inching forward, they found themselves drawn to a tent that stood out amidst the disorder. A suspicion lingered in the air—could this be the tent of the Mongol leader?

Junjie voiced his intuition:

Junjie: "This must be their leader's tent."

Raccomato nodded:

Raccomato: "Yeah kid. (Feigning a spy) Operation enter that tent."

Upon entering, Raccomato, displaying his irreverent charm, leapt onto a bed and lounged as if in a beachside paradise, drinking from a coconut.

Raccomato: "(drinking) This is cozy!"

Junjie, more focused on the task at hand, urgently searched the unknown for clues.

Junjie: "Get off that bed; you don't want to leave your furs there. You'll get us caught."

Raccomato, seemingly unfazed, continued his antics.

Raccomato: "Relax...! What're you searching for?"

Junjie, frustrated yet determined:

Junjie: "I don't know, anything, like a clue or something."

Raccomato, ever the whimsical companion, dove into a wardrobe, emerging in various attires, inadvertently causing havoc in the process. Their escapade unfolded with a mix of suspense, humor, and the constant threat of discovery. Amidst the shadows of the Mongol leader's tent, Junjie issued a determined command:

Junjie: "Bring it down, Duizhǎng; you're overdoing things."

Raccomato, ever the agile and chaotic companion, leaped from one spot to another, wreaking havoc on the tent. A sudden realization struck—they were not alone. Hastily, Junjie and Raccomato concealed themselves beneath a nearby table. The intruder revealed himself, and it was none other than Mönhkbat, the leader. His expression morphed from curiosity to surprise as he surveyed the disarray.

Under the table, Junjie whispered to Raccomato:

Junjie: "It must be him, the leader."

Amidst the tension, Raccomato couldn't resist injecting humor, whispering hilarious jokes about Mönhkbat.

Junjie: "Shhhh..."

Mönhkbat, oblivious to the hidden duo, moved around the room, lifting the wardrobe. A ball rolled out, catching Raccomato's attention.

Raccomato: "(whispering) Ball! I didn't see that earlier."

Unable to resist, Raccomato pounced on the ball.

Junjie: " Duizhǎng no!"

Panic surged as Mönhkbat turned, discovering the intruders.

Mönhkbat: "Intruders!"

Soldiers flooded into the tent. Swiftly, Junjie scooped up Raccomato, who clutched the ball tightly. The chase began, Junjie, with Raccomato in tow, darted through the tent, glimpsing a bag of cowry shells. Realization struck—payment for Raccomato's escapades.

Junjie seized the bag, and with Mongol soldiers in pursuit, they burst out of the camp into the moonlit night. As they sprinted into the woods, a mysterious figure observed them from the shadows, casting an enigmatic presence over their escape. The pursuit intensified as Junjie and Raccomato vanished into the depths of the darkened forest.

The dense forest echoed with the pounding hooves of the relentless Mongol soldiers chasing Junjie. Racing through the underbrush, Junjie's breaths came in ragged gasps. He clutched Raccomato's sack tighter, praying for a miracle in the moonlit night.

As the Mongol soldiers closed in, surrounding Junjie, the air grew heavy with tension. Fear gripped him, and he felt a sinking despair. It seemed like the end of his journey, and a shiver ran down his spine.

Just as the Mongol soldiers prepared to strike, a sudden, deadly intervention altered the course of fate. A swift, silent dagger found its mark, toppling one of the soldiers from his horse. The lifeless body crumpled to the forest floor, the ominous signal of a lurking savior.

The remaining Mongol soldiers, on edge, scanned the shadows for the source of the attack. The moonlight played tricks on the eyes, casting eerie glows across the trees. In the darkness, a mysterious figure moved with lethal grace, striking down another soldier with precision.

The Archer Mongol soldier, determined to uncover the assailant, raised his arrow, scrutinizing the treetops. Moonlight revealed the silhouette of the mysterious killer, poised like a feline predator. The Archer took aim, but before he could release the arrow, a dagger soared through the air, finding its mark.

The Archer fell, his aim lost forever. The Mongol soldiers, now enraged, faced an unseen adversary.

In the hushed realm of the moonlit forest, the mysterious teen figure gracefully descended from the tree, a silent dance with the shadows. Cloaked in a ninja-style attire, her face shrouded in secrecy, she wielded dual shimmering blade that gleamed like moonlight.

As the Mongol soldiers lunged forward, their movements were met with an otherworldly elegance. The teen girl, veiled in mystery, moved with an unearthly swiftness, her blade dancing through the air. Each precise strike culminated in the fall of a soldier, creating an ominous symphony of clashing steel and final breaths. Junjie, paralyzed by the unfolding chaos, watched in horror as the forest transformed into a stage of deadly ballet.

The aftermath revealed two Mongol soldiers still clinging to life, desperately fleeing in opposite directions. Without hesitation, the enigmatic figure intercepted their escape. Turning to the left, she summoned a hidden sword with a swift motion, launching it with an expert kick. The blade soared through the air like a spectral arrow, embedding itself into the back of one soldier. Simultaneously, she hurled her dagger to the right, swiftly silencing the other's desperate retreat.

As the forest's eerie silence settled, Junjie stood agape, clutching Raccomato's sack as if shielding himself from the ghostly avenger. The figure, now turned toward Junjie, met his gaze with an intensity that pierced through the shadows. Feeling the tremor in the air, Junjie held his breath, uncertain whether the enigmatic savior would reveal herself or vanish into the cloak of night once more.

Unfortunately, the mysterious figure melted back into the shadows, leaving Junjie amidst the chaos.

In the wake of this unforeseen intervention, Junjie, still in awe of the mysterious savior, Raccomato peeked out from the sack, wide-eyed and curious.

Raccomato: "(whispering) Kid, who was that kid?"

Junjie: "(whispering back) I have no idea, Duizhǎng. But she saved us."

The forest, once filled with the echoes of battle, now echoed only with the distant sounds of the night. Junjie, still shaken, gathered his courage to continue the journey, knowing that the mysterious girl had left an indelible mark on this moonlit night.

In the dimly lit space of Mönkhbat's tent, shadows dance across the faces of tense Mongol soldiers. Mönkhbat, a commanding presence, erupts in fury, his voice echoing through the canvas walls.

Mönkhbat: "(raging) Where's the child!"

The air grows heavy as the soldiers stiffen in response.

Mongol Soldier: "(head lowered) Our men have gone searching for him, but they're yet to return."

Mönkhbat's eyes, ablaze with fury, pierce through the soldier's bowed head.

Mönkhbat: "Find him, and annihilate him."

His words hang in the air, dripping with menace. The tent seems to tighten around them as Mönkhbat's anger becomes a palpable force, setting the stage for a ruthless pursuit.

In the dappled morning light, Junjie and Raccomato stir from a restless slumber, the memory of a harrowing night etched into their expressions. The forest, now a sanctuary, holds the secrets of their encounter with Mongol soldiers and the enigmatic savior.

Junjie, still bearing the weight of the recent turmoil, rises with a sense of caution, his eyes reflecting the lingering shadows of danger. Beside him, Raccomato shifts with a mixture of anxiety and curiosity, the events of the night etched in their shared consciousness.

Raccomato: "Did I have a dream last night?"

Junjie: "No, it was no dream. Last night's encounter was beyond anything we've faced before."

Raccomato, in his small yet expressive manner, conveys understanding. His eyes, speaking volumes, hint at the gratitude for the mysterious girl who intervened in their dire moment.

As they resume their journey, a renewed determination surfaces. The forest, witness to their trials, seems to offer solace. Junjie, finding strength in companionship, shares his thoughts with his companion.

Junjie: "We owe that girl our lives."

The morning unfolds with a mix of trepidation and resolve, their steps carrying the weight of an unforgettable night, and the promise of a safer dawn.

Amidst the rhythmic cadence of soldiers engaged in their daily routines at the bustling Chinese army camp, Junjie bursts in with a determined urgency. Raccomato, the comedic accomplice, peeks mischievously from the sack bag hung around Junjie's neck.

Soldiers, in various states of training and chanting, form a dynamic backdrop as Junjie navigates through the orchestrated chaos. In his haste, he collides with an elegant teen female soldier, disrupting the harmony of her disciplined stride. The clash sends her helmet tumbling from her grasp.

Junjie, a blend of apologetic and flustered, swiftly recovers, both bending to retrieve the fallen helmet. Their eyes meet in a momentary pause, an unspoken understanding passing between them. Junjie extends the helmet, breaking the silence with a polite gesture.

Junjie: "I apologize. Here's your helmet."

The elegant soldier, her demeanor a mix of grace and strength, accepts the helmet with a nod of gratitude. A brief but courteous conversation unfolds, names left unspoken but connection felt.

Junjie: "Are you alright?"

Elegant Soldier: "No harm done. Thank you."

Junjie, sensing an opportunity for a brief connection, attempts to keep the conversation alive.

Junjie: "I haven't seen you around here before. Are you new here?"

Elegant Soldier: "Just transferred in. I'm still finding my way around."

Their words, polite yet laden with unspoken curiosity, weave a subtle thread of connection. The camp's activities continue around them, but for a moment, their exchange creates a small enclave of shared interest.

Junjie: "Well, welcome."

Elegant Soldier: "Thank you. Hope I see you around kid."

Junjie: "Sure."

As she departs, Junjie's gaze lingers, a subtle curiosity sparking. Raccomato, always attuned to Junjie's emotions, pokes his head out of the sack, shooting a comically suspicious look at Junjie.

Raccomato: "What's got you so captivated, kid?"

Junjie, caught in a moment of contemplation, offers a half-smile, his thoughts veiled in the enigma of the elegant soldier's presence. The camp buzzes around them, unaware of the subtle intrigue unfolding in the wake of an unexpected encounter.

As Raccomato watches the elegant teen female soldier disappear into the camp's activity, he shoots Junjie a knowing look.

Raccomato: "You like her?"

Junjie: "Nah. Just that, (sighed softly in relief, Raccomato raises an eyebrow) No one has ever talked to me so politely like that. She's just so..."

Raccomato, the ever-playful companion, interrupts with a theatrical tone.

Raccomato: "Okay, okay kid, we got work to do!"

Junjie, snapping back to the present.

Junjie: "Sure, sure, we're up for that, Duizhǎng. (Still reasoning about the elegant teen female soldier) I can't believe I bumped into her, and she didn't overreact. If it were to be the General or those bullies, they would've smacked me on the head (gesturing theatrically) and told me that I am a nasty clumsy..."

In the midst of his theatrics, Junjie turns abruptly, only to collide with a horse and its rider. It's Captain Xiu Lan.

Junjie, grinning, greets her.

Junjie: "Hey, Captain Lan!"

Captain Xiu Lan gives Junjie a stern look, her demeanor commanding respect.

Captain Xiu Lan: "Come with me."

The air shifts as Junjie follows Captain Xiu Lan, Raccomato stays within the sack. The camp's bustling activities continue, but a new trajectory unfolds for Junjie, guided by the enigmatic presence of Captain Xiu Lan.

As Junjie trails behind Captain Xiu Lan, the air carries a sense of purpose, their footsteps syncing with the unspoken rhythm of a soldier's duty. The journey takes a turn when they reach a designated spot, and Captain Xiu Lan halts, turning to face Junjie.

Captain Xiu Lan: "You have to drop the sack."

Junjie, puzzled, looks at his cherished sack with hesitation.

Junjie: "What?"

Captain Xiu Lan, with a no-nonsense tone, delivers a directive that challenges Junjie's commitment

Captain Xiu Lan: "Drop the sack. You want to be a true soldier, right?"

Junjie, a mix of determination and uncertainty, affirms his aspiration.

Junjie: "Yes."

Captain Xiu Lan, eyes fixed on Junjie, reinforces the importance of discipline.

Captain Xiu Lan: "Then act like one. (Sternly) Drop the sack."

Reluctantly, Junjie releases his grip on the sack, the weight of attachment and the symbolic act resonating within him. As the sack falls, Captain Xiu Lan resumes her march, and Junjie, now unburdened, follows with a newfound understanding of the expectations that come with being a true soldier. The camp's bustling activities fade into the background, leaving room for the unfolding journey of discipline and growth.

In the secluded backyard, hidden behind the sprawling tents of the camp, Captain Xiu Lan leads Junjie to a sight that startles him. Before them lies a distinct training ground, a sacred space dedicated to the Elite soldiers of the Chinese army. The air carries the weight of discipline and mastery.

Captain Xiu Lan dismounts, and Junjie, still in awe, watches as soldiers move with precision, their training routines a mesmerizing dance of skill and strength.

Captain Xiu Lan: "This is the training ground of the Elite Chinese Armies."

As she guides Junjie through different sections of the training ground, each area reveals a unique aspect of the soldiers' expertise. There's a section for archery, where arrows slice through the air with deadly accuracy. Another area is dedicated to hand-to-hand combat, the soldiers engaging in swift and calculated maneuvers.

Reaching the stick-fighting section, Captain Xiu Lan seizes a wooden pole and tosses it to Junjie. The young warrior, caught in the gravity of the moment, struggles to grasp the intricacies of the airborne weapon. The wooden pole slips through his fingers, clattering to the ground.

Captain Xiu Lan, her gaze unwavering, offers a firm but encouraging tone.

Captain Xiu Lan: "You have to be quicker, Junjie. Let the training ground mold you into a true warrior."

The soldiers around them continue their routines, a living testament to the dedication required to master the ancient Chinese martial arts. The training ground becomes a canvas for the journey that lies ahead for Junjie, where every stumble is a step toward growth.

Amidst the backdrop of the bustling camp, Raccomato remains tucked inside Junjie's dropped sack, his spirited chatter filling the air with humor. He cracks jokes and carries on a one-sided conversation, his comedic timing impeccable.

Raccomato: "Why did the chicken join the army? You think you can get that one? Wanna give it a try? Give it a shot kid! (Brief moment of silence) To prove he had the eggs-traordinary courage, of course! (Laughing)."

But as the laughter fades into an expectant silence, Raccomato notices the absence of Junjie's usual banter. Puzzled, he pokes his head out of the sack, surveying the surroundings to find himself alone.

Raccomato, with an exaggerated expression of faux sadness, drags the sack behind him like a reluctant mourner. The camp continues its lively activities, oblivious to the raccoon's theatrical solitude.

Raccomato: "Oh, Junjie, where art thou? Left alone in this cruel world of jokes and puns..."

As Raccomato "mournfully" meanders away, his antics add a touch of whimsy to the camp's atmosphere, creating a playful interlude amid the disciplined routines of the Chinese army. The sack-dragging raccoon becomes a fleeting spectacle, leaving behind a trail of laughter in his wake.

In the hallowed training ground, Captain Xiu Lan endeavors to mold Junjie into a formidable warrior. They begin with a simple wooden pole, an instrument of discipline and precision. The air is charged with the anticipation of progress.

Captain Xiu Lan: "Focus, Junjie. Swift and steady."

But despite the guidance, Junjie falters. The wooden pole eludes his grasp, clattering to the ground. Undeterred, Captain Xiu Lan leads him through various training sections — from archery, where arrows sing through the air, to hand-to-hand combat, a dance of practiced skill.

Each attempt, however, ends in perceived failure for Junjie. His frustration builds with every misstep, casting a shadow over his once-eager spirit. Captain Xiu Lan, recognizing the struggle, attempts to uplift him.

Captain Xiu Lan: "Persistence is the key, Junjie. Failure is just a stepping stone to success."

But the words fall on deaf ears. Junjie, discouraged and disappointed in himself, begins to lose hope. The dream of becoming a true soldier fades as doubt clouds his resolve.

Captain Xiu Lan: "Don't give up, Junjie. You have potentials."

Despite her encouragement, Junjie, consumed by self-doubt, leaves the training ground with a heavy heart. As he walks away, despondent, the elegant teen female soldier Junjie met earlier observes from a corner, a silent witness to the struggle within him.

The training ground, once alive with the echoes of discipline, now bears the weight of Junjie's uncertainty. Captain Xiu Lan, a pillar of resilience, watches him depart, knowing that the journey to becoming a true soldier is fraught with setbacks. The elegant teen female soldier, sensing the unfolding drama, remains in the shadows, her gaze lingering on the departing figure, perhaps foreseeing a tale of redemption yet to unfold.

Within the moonlit embrace of the dense woods, the imperial scout, astride his horse, navigates the shadows with an air of purpose. It is the same scout who once delivered the ominous conscription notice to Junjie's mother, Wang Min. The haunting echo of the war at hand lingers as he patrols through the silent night.

A subtle awareness prickles at the scout's senses, a feeling that he is not alone in the vast expanse of the forest. He reins in his horse, a silhouette bathed in moonlight, and keenly scans the surroundings for any sign of an intruder. The night holds its secrets, but the imperial scout is not one to be caught unaware.

His skepticism grows with every calculated step. As he prepares to spur his horse forward, a silent menace unfurls from the darkness. A rope, as if summoned by unseen hands, slithers through the night air, swift and precise. In an instant, it tightens around the imperial scout, binding him with an unforgiving grip.

The forest, a silent witness to the unfolding drama, holds its breath as the imperial scout is violently flung from his horse. The startled whinnies of the steed pierce the night as it bolts away, leaving its rider at the mercy of the mysterious assailant lurking in the shadows.

The moonlight, now a conspirator in the clandestine affair, casts an eerie glow upon the fallen scout. The dense woods, veiled in suspense, await the next chapter of this nocturnal tale.

In the heart of the Mongols' camp, the kidnapped imperial scout is dragged in, a captive brought before the formidable Mönhkbat. Horror etches across the scout's face as he gazes upon the imposing figure before him.

Mönhkbat: "Surprise!"

The imperial scout, undeterred by the unexpected greeting, issues a stark warning.

Imperial scout: "The Emperor is coming for you, Mönhkbat."

Mönhkbat dismisses the threat with a sinister grin.

Mönhkbat: "Your Emperor is not smart enough."

The scout, perplexed and defiant, furrows his brow.

Mönhkbat: "Tell me where to find the Mystical Blade?"

Imperial scout: "I don't know what you're talking about."

Mönhkbat seizes the scout by the collar, his face inches away.

Mönhkbat: "Where is the Mystical Blade!?"

Imperial scout: "(stubborn) I don't know a thing."

With a burst of rage, Mönhkbat lifts the scout off the ground, the imperial captive struggling to find his balance.

Mönhkbat: "(raging) Tell me!"

Imperial scout: "(frightened) I don't know. It vanished years ago, and since then, no one have seen it."

Mönhkbat flings the scout to the unforgiving ground, his command directed to the waiting soldiers.

Mönhkbat: "Keep him."

The Mongol soldiers obediently escort the imperial scout away, leaving behind a scene of tension and foreboding in the heart of the Mongols' camp. The quest for the Mystical Blade intensifies, and the captive scout becomes a mere pawn in the unfolding chessboard of power and deception.

Beneath the veiled canopy of the dense woods, the same night unfolds, and a solitary figure emerges. Ling An, his silhouette etched against the shadows, wearily trudges through the foliage. Each step carries the weight of ages, leaving a rhythmic imprint on the forest floor.

In his weathered hands, he drags a sword, a relic of a bygone era. The moon, a silent witness to the passage of time, casts its ethereal glow upon the blade. Once a gleaming masterpiece, the surface now bears the scars and tarnishes of centuries, a reflection of battles fought and secrets held.

As Ling An continues his nocturnal journey, the moonlight traces the contours of the sword's worn hilt, revealing the intricate details that time has etched into its very essence. The night unfolds with a sense of quiet reverence, as if Ling An carries not just a weapon but a legacy, a story whispered through the rustling leaves and the echoes of a forgotten past.

In this dance of moonlight and shadows, the trudging figure becomes a poignant symbol, a keeper of history, and a testament to the enduring spirit that persists within the heart of the dense woods. The night breathes with the weight of memories, and the sword's once-gleaming surface tells a tale that only Ling An knows.

As the morning sun bestows its elegant radiance upon the camp, a panoramic view unveils the orchestrated symphony of military life. Rows of disciplined soldiers stand at attention, General Gang Zhou at the forefront, his authoritative presence echoing through the camp. Captain Xiu Lan stands beside him, an embodiment of unwavering strength, while Qi Rong diligently takes notes.

From a distance, the muffled voice of General Gang Zhou reaches the soldiers, his words a call to action in the face of impending war. Urgency permeates the air, a reminder of the limited time and the gravity of the impending conflict. The soldiers absorb the intensity of the moment, their awareness heightened as they prepare for the challenges ahead.

Amidst this orchestrated display, the canvas of the camp comes alive with a sense of purpose and readiness.

Meanwhile, within the confines of Junjie's tent, a sudden jolt disrupts the tranquility. Junjie, wide-eyed and alarmed, shoots up from his sleep.

Junjie: "Oh no, I'm late!"

His realization punctuates the air, a stark contrast to the disciplined scene unfolding outside. In the quiet recesses of his tent, Junjie's hurried movements mirror the urgency that permeates the camp. As the sun climbs higher, Junjie's race against time becomes a microcosm of the larger preparations for war, adding a personal touch to the impending conflict.

Within the ongoing address to the soldiers, General Gang Zhou's words echo through the camp. Junjie, always the audacious soul, attempts to sneak into the ranks, but his efforts don't escape the notice of the vigilant General.

General Gang Zhou: "Thank you for volunteering, Junjie. You're up for a tournament with Li Dong."

Junjie, startled, can hardly believe his ears.

Junjie: "What?"

General Gang Zhou: "Now."

Li Dong, seizing the opportunity with a wicked smile, relishes the chance to face Junjie in combat. It's a day he has long prayed for, an opportunity to prove his prowess.

As Junjie steps forward, the atmosphere becomes charged with anticipation. General Gang Zhou, with a casual yet commanding air, rolls his hands around his chest, signaling the commencement of the tournament. Qi Rong diligently takes notes, and Captain Xiu Lan, her dissatisfaction palpable, observes with a discerning eye.

The clash begins, but Junjie, aware of his impending defeat, braces himself for the inevitable. Li Dong tosses a pole to Junjie, it elude Junjie's grasp. Li Dong fought with his bare hand, his skill prevails, and Junjie finds himself on the ground. The soldiers, reveling in the spectacle, laugh and mock him. Unable to bear the humiliation, Junjie makes a swift escape.

Amidst the onlookers, the elegant teen female soldier, who once crossed paths with Junjie, watches with compassion. Her eyes, a beacon of understanding, follow Junjie as he runs away, a silent witness to the vulnerability that lies beneath the bravado.

CHAPTER 4

A WARRIOR'S RESOLVE

In the solitude of the woods, Junjie sits, his expression heavy with sadness. Nearby, Raccomato, the ever-spirited joker, busies himself by uprooting vegetables from the earth. In an attempt to lift Junjie's spirits, Raccomato punctuates the air with his silly jokes.

Raccomato, tossing vegetables toward Junjie, forms an impromptu triangle. With a whimsical leap, he descends upon the veggie arrangement, playfully smashing the triangular formation. Undeterred, he starts munching on the vegetables, all the while continuing his comedic banter to coax a smile from Junjie.

As the forest air echoes with laughter, the moment is interrupted by the appearance of an old man. Ling An, carrying logs of firewood, emerges from the shadows. Junjie, drawn to the sight, approaches Ling An with an instinct to help.

Junjie: "Let me help you, sir."

Ling An, acknowledging the gesture, allows Junjie to assist him. As they traverse the woods, Raccomato, sensing the shift in focus, hastily gathers and packs the remaining veggies, determined to catch up with his companions.

The forest becomes a tapestry of camaraderie and mutual support. Junjie, Ling An, and the lively raccoon forge an unexpected alliance, each step resonating with the shared rhythm of their journey through the woods.

In the quiet sanctuary of Ling An's tent, Junjie drops the logs he carried, the weight of his struggles evident in his weary stance. Ling An, a seasoned figure, begins to arrange the logs with precision, as if orchestrating a dance with the flames he intends to birth.

Ling An, with a gentle tone, suggests that Junjie should be heading back. However, Junjie, his voice tinged with a haunting sadness, declares his reluctance to return. He unveils the layers of his

inner turmoil, confessing to being a mistake, a disaster that led him to join the army, yet finding no solace or belonging even within its ranks.

As Junjie pours out his heart, Ling An, unfazed, starts a fire. The flames dance in the daylight, casting an unusual warmth upon the scene. Ling An, in a serene Burmese position, closes his eyes and begins to meditate, an aura of tranquility enveloping him.

In the midst of this solemn moment, Raccomato seizes the opportunity to prepare a makeshift lunch. He gathers veggies, pierces them onto a stick, and skillfully cooks them over the flame, transforming the somber atmosphere into a humble feast.

Ling An, unperturbed by the activities around him, addresses Junjie.

Ling An: "You've been in the army and can't fit in or learn a thing, right?"

Junjie, his tone laden with sorrow, affirms.

Junjie: "Yes."

Ling An extends an offer of hope.

Ling An: "That's quite frustrating. Maybe I could be of help."

Junjie, skeptical yet intrigued, questions Ling An's approach.

Junjie: "And how are you going to do that?"

Ling An, with a glint of mystery, hints at a unique method.

Ling An: "Train you to become a Knight, in a unique way."

Junjie, still doubtful, questions the efficacy of Ling An's unconventional approach.

Junjie: "And why do you think yours will be exceptional?"

Ling An, with a sagely assurance, shares his philosophy.

Ling An: "Effectively training a Knight depends on the trained Knight and the tactics used. Not all method works for everyone, Junjie."

Junjie: "How'd you know my name?"

Ling An: "That's an old man's secret."

As the conversation unfolds, Junjie, grappling with skepticism, sits on the ground. Ling An, continuing his meditation, offers Junjie a glimmer of hope, a possibility of redemption through an uncharted path of training. Meanwhile, Raccomato, having savored his makeshift lunch, lounges contentedly on the ground, his belly full, a silent observer to the unfolding tale of resilience and new-found possibilities.

Under the shroud of night, within the shelter of a tent, the figure of the elegant teen female soldier, who once crossed paths with Junjie, takes form. Born of Mongol heritage, she bears the dual identity of Yan in the realm of China and Enkhmaa among her Mongol kin. She sits in a Burmese position near a flickering fire, engaged in an incantation. As her whispered words weave through the air, an ethereal image materializes in the swirling smoke—Junjie and Raccomato, playing in the moonlit woods on that fateful night. She observes their carefree antics like one watching a mesmerizing tale unfold.

However, the tranquility is shattered as Mönkhbat storms into the tent, accompanied by a procession of soldiers. His presence is a tempest, a storm of frustration echoing through his growls.

Mönkhbat: "(groaning) Grrrr, I need that Blade!"

Quick as a serpent's strike, Enkhmaa disrupts the smoke with a swift motion of her hand. Mönkhbat, fueled by impatience, advances toward her.

Mönkhbat: "Show me the Mystical Blade!"

Enkhmaa meets his gaze, and with practiced incantations, she conjures an illusion, the spectral form of the Mystical Blade emerging from the dissipating smoke.

Mönkhbat, consumed by desire, attempts to grasp the elusive Blade within the confines of the ephemeral image.

Mönkhbat: "Where can I find it, how do I get it?!"

Enkhmaa, unfazed by his urgency, delivers a solemn truth.

Enkhmaa: "You can't."

Mönkhbat: "What?! Why?!"

Enkhmaa: "It's been long lost, years ago."

Mönkhbat, relentless, insists on the possibility of uncovering the Blade's hiding place.

Mönkhbat: "But you're a great Sorceress; you can find where it's harbored."

Enkhmaa, her gaze unwavering, dispels his hopes.

Enkhmaa: "I can't. It's far beyond our reach, far beyond your reach."

Undeterred, Mönkhbat shifts his focus.

Mönkhbat: "If I get my hands on the Mystical Blade, China will tremble! Forget it, with or without the Blade, we'll march into the imperial city!"

His anger directed back at Enkhmaa.

Mönkhbat: "How do I get into the imperial city?"

Enkhmaa, veiled in foreboding, introduces a new obstacle.

Enkhmaa: "Getting into the imperial city would have been easier, but a hurdle has arisen—a formidable adversary capable enough to destroy you."

Mönkhbat, incredulous, demands to see this perceived threat.

Mönkhbat: "What?! Who is he? Show him to me!"

Enkhmaa, with measured incantations, reveals an image of Junjie and Raccomato playing innocently in the woods. Mönkhbat and his soldiers, initially skeptical, burst into laughter.

Mönkhbat: "(laughing really hard) A child? How can a child destroy me?"

As the laughter reverberates, Enkhmaa interjects with a revelation that shatters the mirth.

Enkhmaa: "He is destined to destroy you. He's Ling An's boy."

Mönkhbat's laughter freezes into horror.

Mönkhbat: "(horrified) Ling An?"

The soldiers murmur in shock.

Mönkhbat: "But he's dead."

Enkhmaa dispels the misconception with a solemn truth.

Enkhmaa: "No, he's very much alive and strong. He wants to recruit the boy."

Mönkhbat, refusing to accept this reality, vehemently denies.

Mönkhbat: "No!"

Gazing intently at the image of Junjie, Mönkhbat recognizes him.

Mönkhbat: "The boy, the boy who wrecked my tent. (He turns to his soldiers) Didn't you kill the boy?!"

A soldier stammers in reply.

Soldier: "Our soldiers went after him, but they didn't return. Maybe he overpowered them."

Mönkhbat, consumed by rage, questions the inconceivable.

Mönkhbat: "(raging) How?! A boy?!"

Backing Enkhmaa with a dangerous command, Mönkhbat issues a decree.

Mönkhbat: "Find the boy and kill him."

The scene transitions seamlessly into the reality of Junjie and Raccomato, blissfully playing in the moonlit woods, unaware of the impending storm that seeks to extinguish their innocence.

Laughter weaves through the moonlit air, painting an ephemeral portrait of joy as Junjie and Raccomato engage in playful antics. High above, the mysterious girl leans against a tall tree, observing the spectacle with a blissful smile. She chuckles softly at Raccomato's amusing silliness.

In the midst of their carefree play, Junjie's gaze shifts beyond the immediate joy. Lines of Mongol soldiers on horseback come into view. Junjie and Raccomato, captivated by the unexpected sight, lock eyes with the approaching threat. The mysterious girl, attuned to Junjie's focus, follows his gaze and witnesses the ominous presence of the Mongol soldiers. Her brows furrow in anger.

Raccomato, oblivious to the brewing danger, whispers in curiosity.

Raccomato: "(whispering) Are those guys after us?"

Junjie, his voice hushed with caution, responds.

Junjie: "(whispering back) I don't know."

Raccomato: "(whispering) Maybe they got something reserved for us, like a snack or something."

Raccomato, in his usual carefree manner, waves at the approaching riders.

Raccomato: "Hey, how ya doing?!"

Junjie, quick to grasp the severity of the situation, interrupts Raccomato urgently.

Junjie: "(whispering) Stop, they're Mongols."

Raccomato covers his mouth, realization dawning.

Raccomato: "(whispering) Oh no, this is no good."

The Mongol soldiers, spurred by intent, gallop their horses forward, closing the distance between them and Junjie's trio. Junjie, sensing the impending danger, issues a swift command.

Junjie: "Run!"

In unison, Junjie and Raccomato propel themselves forward, leaving behind the joyous laughter of a moment ago, now replaced by the urgent rhythm of fleeing footsteps beneath the moonlit night.

Amidst the quietude of the camp, Captain Xiu Lan stands resolute outside Junjie's tent, her voice carrying a soft yet earnest plea.

Captain Xiu Lan: "(softly) Junjie, I know it hasn't been easy for you all this while. If only you could just—open; we could soothe things out."

The canvas remains sealed, absorbing her words with silence. She takes a deep breath, unlatching the tent entrance. It swings open, revealing an empty space within. A sigh escapes her lips, a subtle acknowledgment of the unspoken struggles within Junjie's absence.

In the urgency of fleeing footsteps, Junjie races through the moonlit night, Junjie clutches Raccomato. The mysterious girl effortlessly navigates the treetops, leaping from branch to branch, a silent guardian in pursuit. Fate takes a turn as Junjie collides with a dead end, a towering rock wall leaving him trapped. The mysterious girl, discerning his predicament, descends swiftly to confront the approaching Mongol soldiers.

Mysterious Girl: "Stay away from the boy."

The Mongol soldiers' furious gaze fixates on the mysterious girl, their steely determination evident as they dismount, unsheathing their swords. Meanwhile, the two Elite Giant Mongol soldiers maintain their imposing stance on horseback.

Sensing the impending clash, the mysterious girl slowly draws her dual swords from her back, the metallic gleam reflecting the impending intensity of the battle. As the Mongol soldiers charge toward her, the battlefield becomes a canvas for a breathtaking engagement.

The clash intensifies as the mysterious girl faces adversaries more formidable than any she has encountered before. Their great stamina and strength make every strike a test of her skill and resilience. Amidst the melee, the Mongol Archer adds another layer of danger, firing a barrage of arrows with deadly precision.

Undeterred, the mysterious girl, a blur of agile movements, strives to evade the onslaught of arrows, showcasing a dance of evasion amidst the chaos of battle. The clash of steel and the twirl of arrows create a symphony of conflict, each participant pushing their limits in this gripping struggle for dominance on the battlefield.

Amidst the chaos of battle, the mysterious girl moves with an otherworldly grace, and with strategic finesse, she seizes the opportunity presented by the arrows unleashed by the Mongol Archer soldier. As the arrows rain down, she skillfully maneuvers through the chaos, drawing the Mongol soldiers into unwittingly collecting the incoming projectiles.

Exploiting the diversion, the mysterious girl swiftly closes the distance, her dual swords gleaming with purpose. In a whirlwind of calculated strikes, she incapacitates the Archer Mongol soldier, bringing an end to the relentless barrage of arrows.

As the dust settles, only the imposing figures of the two Elite Giant Mongol soldiers remain, dismounting with an ominous presence. With a menacing draw of their colossal swords, the battlefield transforms into a stage for an epic confrontation.

Unyielding, the mysterious girl tightens her grip on her sword and charges towards the formidable adversaries. The clash intensifies, the air pulsating with the clash of steel and the relentless dance

of combat. The Elite Giant Mongol soldiers, towering and formidable, prove to be a force to be reckoned with.

Amidst the frenetic exchange, a moment of vulnerability surfaces as the mysterious girl sustains a cut on her right knee. A pained groan escapes her lips, but the fire in her eyes remains unquenched. Refusing to succumb, she summons unparalleled determination, meeting the onslaught of the two Elite Giant Mongol soldiers with a display of skill and resilience.

In a breathtaking culmination of strength and strategy, the mysterious girl manages to overcome the overwhelming odds, defeating the imposing adversaries. As the battle concludes, she leans on the ground, a testament to the toll of the intense struggle. Junjie, witnessing the fierce spectacle, rushes to her side, concern etched across his face, bridging the gap between the clash of swords and the compassion of a shared victory.

Junjie: "Are you alright?"

The mysterious girl clutches her wound, blood staining her hand. Junjie gently removes her hand, his own now tainted with blood.

Junjie: "Let me help, please."

With a shared agreement, she allows Junjie to tend to her wound. Junjie takes a cloth from his sack and began to tend to the injury. As Junjie delicately tends to the injury, his voice emerges in a soft whisper.

Junjie: "Thank you, for saving me, again."

Their eyes lock in a moment of unspoken connection, the uncharted territory of gratitude and understanding. Junjie, feeling the weight of the unspoken, nervously averts his gaze, immersing himself in the task at hand. The mysterious girl, however, maintains her steady gaze on Junjie, her eyes reflecting a depth of emotion beyond words.

Meanwhile, Raccomato, ever the vigilant sidekick, stands by with a suspicious demeanor, observing the mysterious girl's intense gaze on Junjie. The air is filled with unspoken sentiments, a tableau of gratitude, suspicion, and a connection unfolding amidst the moonlit night.

Amidst this, a commanding voice pierces the aftermath of battle—Captain Xiu Lan.

Captain Xiu Lan: "Junjie, get away from her!"

Xiu Lan launches an attack, and the mysterious girl, ever-ready, engages in a formidable duel. Despite her wounded leg, she fights fiercely. Junjie, sensing the escalating conflict, intervenes.

Junjie: "She's not an enemy; she's a friend! She saved my life!"

Xiu Lan, hesitating, looks at the lifeless Mongol soldiers and spilled blood, torn between doubt and the evidence of battle.

Xiu Lan: "Then why is she dressed like this? (Addressing the mysterious girl) If you're really not an enemy, then show your face."

Junjie watches anxiously as the mysterious girl, unwilling to unveil her identity, retreats into the bushes and disappears. Captain Xiu Lan, still unconvinced, leaves the scene. Junjie confronts her, his frustration palpable.

Junjie: "Why'd you do that?"

Captain Xiu Lan: "Saving your life from that enemy, I guess."

A heated exchange ensues.

Junjie: "She's not an enemy; she's a friend! She has saved me before!"

Xiu Lan: "Then why'd she run away?! Didn't you see it?! If she's truly a bona fide friend why didn't she show her face?! Junjie, I am trying to save you!"

Junjie: "Why are you saving me?! I didn't ask you to save me! I don't want you to save me!"

Xiu Lan: "Didn't you see the mask?! Do you know who's behind it?"

Junjie interrupts.

Junjie: "I don't want to know her!"

Xiu Lan: "She's not what you think she is!"

Junjie: "What do you know?!"

Xiu Lan: "I've lived 30 years in the military. I've seen people like her, lived with people like her, loved people like her, been betrayed by people like her, fought people like her, killed people like her! They stay under the mask and pretend to be a friend but they're..."

Junjie interrupts again.

Junjie: "She's not like those; she's different!"

Xiu Lan: "Really? How sure are you?!"

Junjie: "100% sure! She saved my life; she's my savior!"

Xiu Lan: "She's a spy!"

Xiu Lan overwhelmed with anger and frustration, continues.

Xiu Lan: "Maybe if you were better or perhaps could fight, you won't need someone to defend you! You're a disgrace Junjie!"

Captain Xiu Lan storms away in frustration, leaving Junjie wounded by her words. As she stops and turns back, she witnesses the impact of her harsh judgment on Junjie, leaving him in solitude with the weight of her words.

In the shadows, behind the bushes, the mysterious girl observes the unfolding drama, her identity concealed, and the truth held in the silence of her concealed face.

Morning breaks, and Ling An sits in deep meditation, adopting a Burmese posture. Junjie, wearing the weight of recent events, approaches with a displeased countenance. Ling An acknowledges his presence.

Ling An: "Back so soon?"

Junjie, still nursing the wounds of Xiu Lan's words, responds with a mixture of frustration and curiosity.

Junjie: "I think so."

Ling An, serene in his meditation, senses the disturbance in Junjie.

Ling An: "Now you've seen reasons— Mongols attack— humiliation."

Junjie, shocked by the revelation, questions how Ling An gained this knowledge.

Junjie: "How'd you come to know about that?"

Ling An, maintaining his composed demeanor, drops a hint of mystery.

Ling An: "I know nearly everything. Just quite a lot of things."

Junjie, persistently seeking answers, asks the pivotal question.

Junjie: "How? How is that possible?"

Ling An, revealing his identity, delivers the truth with a touch of enigma.

Ling An: "Because I am Ling An."

Junjie, unimpressed and still grappling with skepticism, probes further.

Junjie: "Yeah, you're Ling An, and how'd you get to know everything?"

Ling An, invoking his mystique, responds with a touch of whimsy.

Ling An: "That's a little old man's secret."

Junjie, holding onto a thread of belief, expresses his willingness to trust.

Junjie: "Okay, I still don't know how you're going to train me, but I just have to believe."

Ling An, emphasizing the deeper facets of becoming a soldier, imparts wisdom.

Ling An: "Believe. Becoming a soldier is more than just believing; it's determination, courage, and selflessness."

Junjie, revealing his true aspirations, shares his genuine desires with Ling An.

Junjie: "I really do not want to be a soldier. I just want to make things right, bring honor to my family, and, a little bit, defend myself."

Ling An, recognizing the complexity of fate, imparts a sobering truth.

Ling An: "What you wish for yourself may not be what destiny wishes for you."

Junjie, expressing his reluctance towards destiny, reveals his true sentiments.

Junjie: "If that's destiny, which means I dislike destiny then."

Ling An, steering the conversation toward Junjie's role in the army, poses a direct question.

Ling An: "You're going to take your place in the army, right?"

Junjie, with warmth, acknowledges the possibility but questions his significance.

Junjie: "Yes, I think so. I don't think I can do anything meaningful; I'm just a camouflage."

Ling An, challenging Junjie's perception, instills a sense of purpose.

Ling An: "One man can make a difference amongst hundreds of army."

Junjie, doubting his potential impact, expresses uncertainty.

Junjie: "I don't think I can be that one man."

Ling An, encouraging and resolute, counters Junjie's doubts.

Ling An: "Anyone can— okay, let's get you prepared. Sit down and meditate."

As Junjie assumes a Burmese posture, confusion lingers.

Junjie: "Meditate about... what actually?"

Ling An, unveiling the essence of meditation, imparts a valuable lesson.

Ling An: "You must learn to be quiet; so you could hear the voice of the ancestors."

Junjie, bemused, questions the concept.

Junjie: "What? Really?"

Ling An, urging silence, provides guidance.

Ling An: "Now stay calm and quiet; (softly) silence..."

In the ensuing moments of stillness, Junjie attempts to comply.

Junjie: "Okay, I'm quiet. I still can't hear anything. All I hear are birds singing. (Re; birds) Wow, that's really a nice chirp—"

Ling An, abruptly interrupting, asserts the importance of silence.

Ling An: "(Yelling) Quiet!"

The scene gracefully unfolds as Junjie and Ling An find tranquility in their shared meditation, enveloped in a cocoon of peaceful silence.

The mountain, a silent witness to Junjie's transformation, loomed tall as he embarked on a journey of ancient training methods bestowed by Ling An. Day and night became a seamless dance, the transition marked by the sun and moon exchanging roles in the sky.

Ling An handed Junjie scrolls containing ancient wisdom, each scroll revealing a layer of the intricate tapestry of martial arts and the different aspect of his training. The mysterious ancient tome labeled JĪNGTŌNG intrigued Junjie, and Ling An's explanation followed, "JĪNGTŌNG – the convergence of body, mind, and spirit."

Scene 1: Kung Fu Ballet

Beneath the morning sun, Junjie engaged in a unique form of Kung Fu. The mountain's echoes amplified the rhythm of his movements. Ling An's voice cut through the air, "Every strike tells a story, be the author of your own dance." Junjie, at first rigid, found fluidity in the fusion of martial prowess and artistic expression.

Scene 2: Arrow's Precision

As the sun dipped below the horizon, Junjie faced the daunting task of mastering archery. The moonlit night became his canvas. Ling An's guidance echoed, "Feel the bow as an extension of your spirit, let each arrow carry your intention." Junjie's first attempts fell short, but perseverance painted constellations in the sky with each arrow that found its mark.

Scene 3: Tai Chi Serenity

Amidst the midday shadows, Junjie embraced the tranquility of Tai Chi. His body moved like the gentle sway of willow branches, seeking balance in a world of chaos. Ling An's wisdom accompanied every graceful shift, "Harmony with yourself breeds harmony with the world." Junjie stumbled,

the fluidity eluding him, but Ling An's reassurance lingered, "Serenity arises from embracing imperfection."

Scene 4: Eagle's Gaze

With the onset of evening, Junjie delved into the intricacies of Eagle's Gaze. His eyes, keen and focused, followed Ling An's swift movements. Ling An's voice urged, "See beyond appearances, anticipate the unspoken." Junjie faltered, the elusive precision of the eagle eluding his gaze, but Ling An's encouragement persisted, "Patience, young one, the eagle's mastery comes with time."

Scene 5: Water's Flow

Under the starlit sky, Junjie immersed himself in the teachings of Water's Flow. By a moonlit pond, he attempted to mimic the fluidity of water. Ling An's whispers guided him, "Adapt like water, shapeless yet powerful." Junjie struggled to emulate the ever-changing form of water, yet Ling An's counsel resonated, "In vulnerability lies strength."

Scene 6: Qi Gong Resilience

With the mountain shrouded in the pre-dawn mist, Junjie ventured into Qi Gong Resilience. Ling An directed him to channel his energy, blending the physical with the spiritual. Ling An's guidance permeated the air, "Inhale strength, exhale doubt." Junjie, initially overwhelmed by the concept, gradually found resilience in the rhythm of breath.

Scene 7: Cloud Steps

Under the moonlit night, Junjie practiced Cloud Steps, his movements mimicking the drifting clouds. Ling An's voice guided him, "Blend with the night, become one with the shadows." As Junjie stumbled, Ling An's encouragement echoed, "Balance is the key; let the clouds carry you."

Junjie, his expression a mixture of bewilderment and concern, muttered to himself, "How can the clouds carry me?" His words hung heavy in the air, echoing his uncertainty about the fantastical journey ahead.

Scene 8: Lotus Enlightenment

With the first light of dawn, Junjie embraced Lotus Enlightenment. Meditating on a floating lotus leaf in a serene pond, he faced the challenge of maintaining focus. It appears as though gravity might claim its victory, and Junjie's journey into the lotus position might be cut short.

With a heart-stopping wobble, Junjie nearly succumbs to the precarious nature of the posture. The delicate balance between success and an imminent fall hangs in the air. Yet, with a surge of determination, he regains control, muscles quivering but resolute.

However, amidst this fleeting struggle, the ancient tome labeled JĪNGTŌNG slips from Junjie's grasp, a silent descent towards the water. In an instant response, Ling An, the watchful guide, poised nearby with his weathered cane, acts with swiftness and precision. The cane gracefully intercepts the falling book mid-air, a dance of mastery against the pull of gravity.

Time seems to slow momentarily as the handoff occurs – from Junjie's tentative grip to the sure and steady catch of Ling An's cane. The book JĪNGTŌNG suspended briefly between realms, finds sanctuary in the guiding hands of the seasoned mentor.

The ripples told tales of Junjie's struggles, but Ling An's voice resonated, "Find calm in chaos, let the lotus guide your mind."

A hushed breath escapes Junjie, the tension in the air dissipating as the ancient wisdom is safeguarded. Junjie, still perched in the lotus position, looks to Ling An with a mix of gratitude and determination, their silent exchange embodying the intricate dance of mentor and apprentice, where steadiness prevails over momentary instability.

But despite his best efforts, Junjie stumbled and fell into the water. As he emerged on the other side of the lake, he came face to face with Raccomato, who wrinkled his nose in disgust at Junjie's unpleasant smell from the stinky lake. Frustrated and dejected, Junjie furrowed his brow and stormed away. Ling An observed Junjie's reaction with a half-smile playing on his lips.

Scene 9: Bamboo Whispers

As the sun emerged, Junjie immersed himself in Bamboo Whispers. Amidst the bamboo groves, he strained to discern the soft rustle of leaves. Ling An's wisdom accompanied him, "Hear the secrets of the wind, let the bamboo teach you the language of nature."

Scene 10: Shadow Dancing

Dusk brought forth Shadow Dancing. Junjie, a swift silhouette against the fading light, mimicked the elusive shadows. Ling An's guidance whispered, "Merge with darkness, let your movements be a mystery." Failed attempts were met with encouragement, "Patience, young one, the shadows unveil their secrets slowly."

Scene 11: Dragon's Breath

In the quiet of the night, Junjie delved into Dragon's Breath. Controlled inhalations echoed through the mountain. Ling An's counsel echoed, "Harness the power within, breathe life into your strength." Junjie's perseverance led to a mastery of breath, a newfound internal force.

Junjie's journey was marked by numerous failures, moments of vulnerability, and doubts.

Junjie struggled, stumbled, and faced moments of doubt, haunted by Captain Xiu Lan's words "You're a disgrace Junjie!" which echoes in his ears. Yet, with each failure, Ling An's encouragement resonated louder.

Amidst these scenes, Junjie immersed himself in the scrolls and the essence of JĪNGTŌNG, translating failures into lessons learned.

The training ground became a canvas painted with the sweat, perseverance, and determination of a novice evolving into a skilled warrior. Ling An's guidance, echoing through the mountain, transformed Junjie's struggles into stepping stones on the path to mastery. Each failure became a lesson, vulnerability a source of strength, and the mountain bore witness to the emergence of a stronger and wiser warrior with resilience etched into every movement.

Night falls over the army camp. Captain Xiu Lan patrols diligently, keeping a watchful eye. Junjie enters the camp, gesturing toward his tent, and notices Captain Xiu Lan, greeting her with a Kung Fu gesture.

Junjie: "Captain."

As Junjie walks past, Captain Xiu Lan calls out.

Captain Xiu Lan: "Junjie..."

Junjie turns to face her.

Captain Xiu Lan: "(warmly) I'm sorry for using those harsh words on you the other day."

Junjie: "(warmly) I'm sorry too, for being stubborn. I would say thanks to you."

Captain Xiu Lan: "What'd you mean?"

Junjie: "Your harsh words help strengthened my resolve."

Captain Xiu Lan smiles, then places her hand on Junjie's shoulder, nodding. Junjie warmly smiles in return and continues on his way. Heading to his tent, Raccamoto pokes his head out from Junjie's sack.

Raccamoto: "What's up?"

Junjie: "She apologized for the harsh words she used on me the other day."

Raccamoto: "Harsh words? When was that? Was I there?"

Junjie: "(rolls eyes) No, you were hiding behind the garbage."

Raccamoto: "Serious?"

They share a lighthearted moment and walk off together.

Beneath the verdant canopy, Junjie and Raccomato seamlessly blend newfound skills with playful camaraderie. Bathed in the dappled sunlight, Junjie, embodying his learned prowess, lines an arrow with meticulous precision, setting his sights on an apple swaying gently in the breeze. With a fluid release, the arrow cuts through the air, finding its mark at the core of the fruit. Raccomato, ever agile, catches the falling apples in a graceful sequence. Junjie adeptly lines three arrows on his bow, releasing them in a seamless display of precision. The arrows, akin to guided spirits, split mid-air, each finding its mark with surgical precision – the nodes of apples hanging tantalizingly on the boughs. Raccomato, displaying agility and finesse, catches each falling fruit with a choreographed dance of hands, ensuring not a single apple meets the ground.

As they revel in their display of skill, Raccomato takes a moment of respite on a moss-covered stone. His mouth full, he jests about the unexpected joys of learning Tai chi.

Raccomato: "Learning Tai chi wasn't bad after all, kid!"

Junjie, in a rhythmic cadence, continues his showcase of skill, directing arrows with an artful grace to cut through various fruits, the forest momentarily transforming into his canvas of expertise. Each successful strike echoes not only his growing proficiency but also the unwavering bond between the duo as Raccomato, with practiced ease, snatches each sliced fruit from the air.

Raccomato: "Coconut, get coconuts!"

Junjie aiming at coconuts dangling from a distant tree. Junjie lines three arrows on his bow, releasing them in a seamless display of precision. The arrows, like guided messengers, sever the coconuts from their perches, each release punctuated by the rustling leaves and the rhythmic thud of coconuts falling. Raccomato, in an attempt to catch the cascading coconuts, they smashes on his head. With a startled yelp, Raccomato stiffened and tumbled forward, landing face-first on the ground with an audible thud.

Junjie: "Oops, sorry!"

Yet, their harmonious training is momentarily disrupted by an unsettling sound — the distressed whinny of a horse. The duo follows the sound, weaving through the foliage until they discover a black horse, its majestic frame tangled in ropes, struggling to break free. Junjie, with a soothing demeanor, approaches the distressed creature, calming it with gentle words and touch.

As Junjie meticulously untangles the horse, a bond forms between them. The horse, now free, becomes an unexpected companion in their woodland escapades.

Junjie: "(to Raccomato) How would you like a new friend around, Duìzhǎng?"

Raccomato: "Um, cows aren't bad after all."

Raccomato perched on the horse's back. As they walk away, Junjie looks at the horse with a thoughtful expression.

Junjie: "What am I going to call you?"

The horse whinnies, as if suggesting an answer.

Raccomato, ever the quick-witted joker, chimes in: "C'mon, he already got a name 'Cow'!"

The horse vehemently disagrees with a toss of its head.

Raccomato: "Oh, you're picky! What'd you want to be called?! How about 'Thunderhoof'?!"

Junjie: "(smiling) "What about Fenhua?"

The horse whinnies in agreement, sealing the name's fate. A moniker that seems to resonate with the horse's spirited demeanor.

Raccomato: "Fenhua, huh? Not bad, kid!"

The trio, now with a new member in tow, ventures deeper into the woods, the rustling leaves and soft hoof beats harmonizing with the laughter of newfound companionship.

CHAPTER 5

THE SHATTERED ILLUSION

The atmosphere hums with intrigue as Junjie, walks in with Fenhua, Raccomato dismounting. Ling An is deeply absorbed in meditation with closed eyes, seated in a Burmese position.

Junjie, brimming with excitement, interrupts Ling An's meditation.

Junjie: "Zhǎngwò, check what I found! (Points proudly to Fenhua) That's Fenhua."

Fenhua whinnies.

Ling An, with playful banter, responds.

Ling An: "Nice sheep you got there! You're gonna train your sheep to be a scrapper."

Junjie, puzzled, questions the term.

Junjie: "Scrapper?"

Raccomato, now masquerading as a horse trainer in cowboy attire with a miniature cane, takes center stage, inspecting Fenhua.

Raccomato: "Okay, let me take a look at ya. Too skinny, dust-filled, covered in lice, (awfully, to Fenhua) have you been living in a pig sty? Okay, do some jogging... (Fenhua begins to jog) ...low stamina, I bet you won't keep up in a 100-meter race."

Junjie, amused, dismisses the idea.

Junjie: "(Chuckles) Don't be silly, Duizhǎng. You're not fit for that."

Ling An interjects.

Ling An: "I know the perfect one for the job."

He whistles, and a WHITE, HUGE, VIBRANT, MAGNIFICENT SPARKING HORSE leaps into view.

Horses WHINNIES, Raccomato's eyes widen, and his lower lip drops.

Junjie: "(Astounded) Oh my..., Zhǎngwò is this yours?"

Ling An: "That's MAZU."

Junjie, impressed, comments on Mazu's gallantry.

Junjie: "Wow, he's so gallant, and kinda proud too."

Ling An: "He's a proud horse. A spirit guide actually."

Mazu walks proudly up to Fenhua, glances at him, then walks away. Fenhua and Raccamoto follow suit.

Junjie: "Spirit guide?"

Ling An confirms and shares a personal story.

Ling An: "Yes. He was given to me by the ancestors on the day I cried out to them. That day— I felt the world on my shoulders, seeking answers to the fate of China. (Junjie listens intently) Thanks to the gods, the ancestors gave me answers."

Junjie, captivated, inquires about the answer.

Junjie: "What's the answer?"

Ling An: "The answer?"

Junjie: "(curious) Yes."

Ling An, gazing into the sky, delivers a profound response.

Ling An: "The one in whose hand the fate of China lies is close by."

Junjie: "Who's the one?"

Junjie, follows Ling An's gaze, looking skyward seeking answers.

Ling An: "The answer you seek... (Touches Junjie's chest)... lies within your heart."

Emotion stir within Junjie as Ling An imparts wisdom, trying to comprehend Ling An's words.

Ling An: "(Picks up a sword from his side) You see, Junjie, I was at your age when I first saw and held the Mystical Blade."

Junjie: "(curious) Is that the Mystical Blade?"

Ling An: "Yes."

Junjie: "Just like what I envisioned in my dreams."

Ling An: "Seventeen years ago, I was entrusted with it when the war became more intense. I wasn't ready yet, but I had to follow the path of struggles. The world thought I was lost, but the gods found me and strengthened me."

Ling An hands Junjie the Blade. Junjie takes it, curiously examining the ancient artifact.

Junjie: "Seventeen years ago, that was when I was born."

Ling An: "You were born into war. Those born into war are the Masters of war, the stumbling block to the enemies. Someday you'll be the guardian of the Mystical Blade."

Junjie, overwhelmed, expresses doubt.

Junjie: "I don't think I can, I'm not ready for that."

Ling An reassures him, emphasizing guidance from the ancestors.

Ling An: "You're never going to be ready; it's just a leap of faith. The ancestors will guide you."

Ling An gazes up at the sky.

Ling An: "Look up here, Junjie. What do you see?"

Junjie: "(Looking up) I see... clouds."

Ling An taps Junjie's head with his cane. Junjie groan.

Ling An: "Look further; there's more. What do you see?"

Junjie: "I see..., nothing."

Ling An taps Junjie's head again. Junjie groan.

Ling An: "Keep looking, listen to your heart's call. Let your heart guide you. The answer you seek is within."

Ling An retreats into his tent, leaving Junjie outside.

Junjie, pondering on Ling An's word.

Junjie: "Heart's call—"

Ling An: "Just keep looking!"

Junjie now alone, continues to peer into the vastness, contemplating his destiny.

The soldiers are gallivanting, chanting, and some are immersed in their routines. Captain Xiu Lan walks purposefully towards Junjie's tent, the lively atmosphere around her contrasting with her focused demeanor. She reaches Junjie's tent, opens the curtain, but Junjie is not inside. Determined, she enters, scanning the tent. Something catches her eye. She picks it up—it's the book JĪNGTŌNG. Recognition dawns on her face as she realizes it belongs to Ling An, her stern expression hinting at a deeper understanding of its significance.

Back at Ling An's harbor, Junjie remains in silent contemplation, his gaze fixed solemnly on the sky. In a few moments of mystical wonder, the clouds start to morph, crafting the intricate portrait of humans. Junjie's eyes intensify in their focus as the ethereal display unfolds. The clouds take the shape of four armed warriors, three male figures and one female, creating an awe-inspiring celestial tableau. The air is pregnant with the magic of the moment as Junjie witnesses this otherworldly manifestation.

Amidst the tranquil night, the mysterious girl perches on a tree, lost in contemplation. Suddenly, her thoughts materialize into illusions—one embodying positivity, the other negativity.

The positive illusion exudes a delightful persona, characterized by humor, tranquility, goodness, and unwavering truthfulness, akin to that of a deity. In stark contrast, the negative illusion embodies deception, cunning, feigned kindness, and possesses attributes reminiscent of the devil.

With infectious enthusiasm, the positive illusion revels in her newfound surroundings, showcasing fluid movements as she gracefully navigates the intricate details of the forest—exploring plants, trees, and the natural beauty that surrounds her.

Positive Illusion: "(joyful) Where are we?! What's this place?! (Exploring the surroundings) This is incredible!"

Meanwhile, the negative illusion attempts to console the mysterious girl.

Negative Illusion: "What's troubling you, my dear?"

Mysterious Girl: "(curious) Who are you guys?"

The positive illusion flits over.

Positive Illusion/Negative Illusion: "We are you."

Mysterious Girl: "Me?"

Negative Illusion: "We're your thoughts."

The positive illusion gleefully flies around, inspecting the surroundings.

Positive Illusion: "For years I've been living in a hollow. But now I'm free, (joyful cry) I'm never going back!"

The negative illusion, perched on the tree, tries to console the mysterious girl.

Negative Illusion: "I understand your burden."

Mysterious Girl: "(inquiring) You do?"

Negative Illusion: "Yes, I'm your thoughts, remember?"

Mysterious Girl: "What do you think I should do?"

The negative illusion offers advice.

Negative Illusion: "I say you go for it."

The positive illusion instantly appears.

Positive Illusion: "No way, she can't do that! She's going to get killed. We're all going to get killed."

Negative Illusion: "(calm) She's not going to get killed."

Positive Illusion: "Of course she will. It's not her destiny."

Negative Illusion: "Then whose destiny!?"

Positive Illusion: "(arguing) Someone out there!"

An intense argument ensues.

Negative Illusion: "Do you know what destiny is? She's better than destiny, vibrant than destiny. She has everything, even more than the destined!"

Positive Illusion: "She has everything, even more than the destined, I know. But destiny is paramount and inevitable!"

Negative Illusion: "(defiant) She must do it. The fate of China is in her hands. Many lives will be lost if she doesn't act fast."

Positive Illusion: "You know this isn't right. You know it isn't her destiny. You're only doing this for your deceptive gains. You're evil!"

As the illusions clash, the mysterious girl intervenes sternly.

Mysterious Girl: "Stop it! (Firmly) I'll go."

Positive Illusion: "(defeated) What? You can't."

The negative illusion interrupts.

Negative Illusion: "You can."

Mysterious Girl: "I have to. So many lives have been lost. I don't want any more lives to be lost. I don't see anyone out there who can do it."

The positive illusion, acknowledging defeat, begins to fade away. The fading positive illusion leaves a lingering warning.

Positive Illusion: "Your action may leave an indelible mark of regret on us. Remember, destiny is inevitable."

With a fading whisper, the positive illusion disappears. The negative illusion watches with an ominous gaze as the mysterious girl remains resolute in her decision.

In the dimly lit tent, Mönkhbat, burdened by the weight of time, commands his soldier to summon the imperial scout. The scout is forcefully dragged in, bearing the marks of brutality—torn garments and bloodstains.

Mönkhbat, seated with an air of anticipation, addresses the imperial scout with a chilling certainty.

Mönkhbat: "The day I've awaited is upon us."

Imperial scout: "The day you long for will be the day of your downfall. (He meets Mönkhbat's ominous gaze, defiant yet weary)"

Mönkhbat, lowering himself to eye level, grips the imperial scout's jaw, their eyes locked.

Mönkhbat: "I've taken my stand; I cannot be toppled."

As Mönkhbat rises, turning his back to the imperial scout, he issues a stern command.

Mönkhbat: "(Softly) Go tell your Emperor that I will pay him a visit."

The imperial scout, worn and battered, wearily flees the tent to deliver Mönkhbat's ominous message.

Under the cloak of the ominous darkness, the mysterious girl silently observes the imperial scout's departure, then embarks on her mission. Stealthily navigating the camp, she moves with grace, dispatching Mongol soldiers along her path. She maneuvers seamlessly into Mönkhbat's tent, finding him isolated.

Mysterious girl: "Perfect timing."

Mönkhbat: "Who are you?"

Mysterious girl: "Your worst nightmare."

Drawing her dual sword, a silent duel ensues. Mönkhbat unsheathes a sword from his desk. The clash reverberates through the tent, a mesmerizing and menacing dance of death. Unheard by Mongol soldiers, the battle creates chaos and havoc, leaving the once-dignified tent in ruins. Mönkhbat's formidable skills overwhelm the mysterious girl, resulting in a cut to her right knee, mirroring a prior wound. The intensity of their clash continues to escalate, with the mysterious girl ultimately retreating, anticipating the arrival of Mongol soldiers.

Just outside the tent, illusions of the mysterious girl— both positive and negative— materialize. The positive illusion hovers proudly, resembling one lounging on a beach chair, while the negative illusion attempts to console.

Negative illusion: "Oh, my dear, you got a wound. You were close, almost had Mönkhbat. Come, let's treat your wound; we'll go back and get Mönkhbat."

Positive illusion: "(Proudly) I warned ya, but you didn't listen. You had a wound before, and now you've got another wound. Even my leg is bleeding!"

Fleeing and clutching her wound, the mysterious girl rolls her eyes.

Mysterious girl: "Shut up."

They vanish into the shadows, leaving behind the echoes of their silent confrontation on the tumultuous battlefield.

In the aftermath of the chaotic battle within Mönkhbat's ravaged tent, the warlord seethes with fury.

Mönkhbat: "Who was that kid?!"

The soldiers stand in tense silence, wary of their enraged leader.

Mönkhbat issues a stern command, his voice cutting through the palpable tension.

Mönkhbat: "Round up. We are going to the imperial city!"

His eyes narrow as he turns to another set of soldiers, his intent clear.

Mönkhbat: "Find that kid and bring me her head in a charger!"

With a swift and purposeful response, the soldiers mobilize, rushing out to execute Mönkhbat's vengeful orders. The air crackles with the intensity of impending pursuit and retribution.

Under the sun's gentle rays, Junjie meditates in a Burmese position. Ling An joins him, and Raccomato stretches before heading to where Fenhua is stationed. Ling An settles beside Junjie.

Ling An: "I see you're getting ready."

Junjie: "(not sure) I guess."

Ling An: "It's nothing more than a leap of faith."

Junjie: "What are you intending to do about the war, Zhǎngwò?"

Ling An: "Nothing."

Junjie: "You're not planning to do anything?"

Ling An: "No."

Junjie: "But you're the bearer of the Mystical Blade; you could know who's destined to save China."

Ling An: "Don't worry, Junjie. Destiny will find the one in whose hand the fate of China lies. The person will show up at the appointed time."

As Junjie ponders, he suddenly recalls something.

Junjie: "The mysterious girl!"

Ling An: "Who's that?"

Junjie: "She saved my life countless times from the Mongols. She's so daring and dashing; she could be of help. I need to go look for her."

Junjie swiftly runs off, Raccomato and Fenhua following closely behind. The air is charged with a sense of urgency and determination.

The soldiers are gallivanting. The imperial scout wearily walks in, soldiers help him and bring him to General Gang Zhou. Gang Zhou emerges, accompanied by Captain Xiu Lan and Qi Rong.

The soldiers lay the imperial scout on the ground.

Imperial scout: "(panting) General..., Mönkhat..., he's heading to the imperial city (coughing)."

All the soldiers are horrified.

Gang Zhou: "Get him water!"

The soldiers provide water, and the general kneels to give it to the imperial scout.

Gang Zhou: "Rest, my friend, rest."

The General's anger rages. He gets up and turns to his troops.

Gang Zhou: "Soldiers, the time we've been waiting for— the cause we've been training for has come. The Mongols are heading to the imperial city. If we move fast, we may get there before them. Everyone, pack up; we're moving out, now!"

As he walks away, Qi Rong urges the troops into action.

Qi Rong: "You heard the General, move — move move..."

Some soldiers take the imperial scout, while the rest hurriedly rush into their various tents.

Xiu Lan rushes into her tent. As she packs, she notices the book JĪNGTŌNG. She stares at it for a moment, picks it up, and puts it into her bag. The scene closes on the bag as it goes out of focus. The tension builds as the troops prepare for the impending conflict.

Junjie, Fenhua, and Raccomato traverse the forest in search of the mysterious girl.

Raccomato: "What are we looking for, actually?"

Junjie: "The mysterious girl. (Junjie raises voice, calling out for the mysterious girl) I know you may be around, somewhere. Please come out; we need you... (Warmly) ...China needs you (sighed)."

Raccomato ponders.

Raccomato: "Mysterious girl. Is it a snack?"

Junjie: "No, don't you remember? The girl that saved us from the (playfully gestures an attacking zombie) ferocious monkeys!"

Junjie chases Raccomato like a zombie, and Raccomato runs away, with Fenhua following. Laughter and joy fill the air as they continue their theatrics. Approaching the edge of the mountain slope, Junjie catches Raccomato, and laughter along with joyful whinnies echo through the forest. In the midst of their play, Junjie's eyes are drawn beyond the mountain. He sees black smoke curling into the sky from a distance. As they watch, Mongol soldiers appear, galloping towards them.

Junjie: "Guys!?"

They swiftly hide behind the bushes. As the Mongol soldiers pass, they emerge. Junjie is horrified, glancing back at the smoke, starting to comprehend the situation.

Junjie: "Chaos!"

He rushes.

Junjie: "Come on, guys, we need to go tell the General."

Junjie mounts Fenhua, with Raccomato alongside, and they gallop off, the urgency evident in their motions as they head into the chaos.

Junjie gallops into the Chinese army camp and swiftly dismounts, greeted by an eerie quiet. He scans the surroundings.

Junjie: "General! General!"

Rushing into General Gang Zhou's tent, Junjie finds it empty. He moves on to Captain Xiu Lan's tent, also empty. He checks several other tents, but nobody is in sight. Junjie is gripped by horror.

Raccomato: "What's up with everybody? Is this hide and seek or something? If it is, I'm in, baby!"

Junjie rushes into his tent, searching frantically for the book JĪNGTŌNG, but it's nowhere to be found. It dawns on him to check for Ling An.

Junjie: "Zhǎngwò!"

He rushes out, mounts Fenhua with Raccomato, and they gallop off in search of answers.

Junjie's voice echoes from afar.

Junjie: "Zhǎngwò! Zhǎngwò!"

He searches frantically, startled to find Ling An missing. Junjie screams at the top of his lungs.

Junjie: "Zhǎngwò! Zhǎngwò! (Sighed, warmly) Zhǎngwò."

The mysterious girl's voice comes from behind him.

Mysterious girl: "Looking for your master?"

Junjie turns to see the mysterious girl on a tree, leaping down.

Junjie: "Ah, there you are! I've been looking everywhere for you. Thank goodness I've found you."

However, the mysterious girl, no longer the friend he once knew, attacks Junjie. He dodges her strikes but is taken aback.

Junjie: "What's going on? I thought we were friends."

The mysterious girl, filled with anger, continues her assault, and Junjie, unarmed, dodges desperately.

Mysterious girl: "Friends? I'm no friend of yours. I got wounds on my leg because of you!"

She kicks Junjie, sending him flying.

Junjie: "Captain Xiu Lan was right about you; you're a fraud."

Mysterious girl: "I've been appointed to kill you. I must fulfill my bidding."

As she charges, Junjie grabs a rod from the ground, engaging in a deadly clash of teen warriors. The battlefield becomes a test of strength and resilience.

Junjie: "I should never have trusted you. I should have let Captain Xiu Lan kill you when she had the chance."

Mysterious girl: "No one can subdue me. Ling An must have done his best on you, but you're never going to be better."

Junjie: "I don't need to be better. It's just a leap of faith."

Mysterious girl: "We'll see about that."

The battle persists, a deadly dance of swift movements and strategic strikes. The mysterious girl avoids Junjie's attacks, maintaining her deadly precision.

Mysterious girl: "Is that your best shot?"

Junjie: "No, I've got more."

Junjie initiates his routines.

Junjie: "Water's Flow!"

Rolling her eyes, the mysterious girl prepares herself. Junjie, utilizing the Water's Flow technique, charges toward her with his rod raised high. The mysterious girl raises her dual sword, clashes them together, and a gust of wind sends Junjie flying to the ground.

Junjie: "(horrified) Sorcery! No, no, no, that's cheating!"

Mysterious girl: "Try harder, boy."

Junjie: "I may not have sorcery powers, but I do know how to harness the powers of the elements, I guess."

He springs to his feet.

Junjie: "Elemental Harmony!"

Initiating a special Shaolin routine, gusts of wind form above him. As he spurs his hand forward, the wind propels along, sending the mysterious girl flying.

Junjie: "Aha! What about that?!"

Mysterious girl: "Not good enough. Check out the Elemental Harmony 2.0."

Junjie: "2.0? What is that?"

She gets up, performing her own special Shaolin routine, summoning a larger gust of wind that sends Junjie flying.

Mysterious girl: "(proudly) I told ya! You should try harder."

Undeterred, Junjie charges, quickly picking up his rod and swinging it in a deadly arc.

Junjie: "Qi Gong!"

Initiating the Qi Gong technique, Junjie attacks relentlessly. The mysterious girl stands still, effortlessly dodging all of Junjie's strikes.

Junjie: "What do you mean by harder? You're not my master! What are you anyway? Some kind of witch?"

With each strike, Junjie's movements became more fluid and precise, his determination driving him forward. However, the mysterious girl effortlessly dodged every attack, her movements flowing with a grace that seemed otherworldly. Observing Junjie's efforts, the mysterious girl couldn't help but offer her assessment. "Nice moves," she commented, her voice carrying a hint of amusement. "I will rate you a C for that." Junjie's frustration boiled over at the girl's casual evaluation. "What!? You rating me?" he exclaimed, incredulous. "How dare you?" Undeterred by his outburst, Junjie intensified his assault, striking with even greater force in an attempt to prove himself.

As he throws a strike, the mysterious girl skillfully blocks it, then throws Junjie to the ground.

Mysterious girl: "You're actually doing great."

Junjie pants in frustration, struggling to understand the mysterious girl's unparalleled skills.

Mysterious girl: "It seems you're afraid, huh?"

Junjie: "(Solemnly) I am not afraid."

Mysterious girl: "If you're afraid, your abilities weigh down. Fear is your weakness."

Junjie: "How'd you know that? Zhǎngwò never told me such."

Mysterious girl: "Yeah, he never did, he never had the chance."

Junjie: "But, I'm not afraid."

Junjie places his hand on his chest. His heart is beating really hard.

Mysterious girl: "See! You're scared —"

Junjie: "I'm not!"

Mysterious girl: "If you're not, then prove it."

Junjie: "(Yelling) I am not afraid!"

Junjie sprawled up to his feet.

Junjie: "Shadow Dancing!"

Mysterious girl: "Tai Chi Serenity!"

Junjie charges again, his rod held high. Despite his efforts, he struggles to prevail over the mysterious girl. Charging once more,

Junjie: "Cloud Steps!"

Three swift cuts of failure.

Junjie finds himself on the ground, frustrated and determined to overcome his limitations.

The mysterious girl is a daring opponent, her movements fluid and graceful. She remains the only person Junjie can't beat, but he remains determined. His eyes are fixed on her face.

Junjie seizes an opportunity, splashing dust on the mysterious girl to distract her. He swiftly leaps toward her, but with a mesmerizing and graceful stance, she blocks his strike. Junjie is startled by her skills, and she retaliates with a kick that sends him flying, crumpling to the ground.

As the mysterious girl advances, Junjie crawls backward, pointing his rod at her.

Junjie: "Stay back in the name of the Emperor!"

The mysterious girl kicks the rod out of Junjie's hand and kneels down before him, looking into his eyes.

Junjie: "What? What are you doing?"

Mysterious girl: "Your Emperor is in danger."

Junjie: "What do you mean?"

Mysterious girl: "Mönkhbat has reached the Imperial City."

Junjie is startled.

Mysterious girl: "You never wondered why you didn't see your comrades. I do not see them winning this battle."

Junjie: "How?"

Mysterious girl: "The people they're battling are not ordinary people. They are the hounds of war, the devil's horsemen. None of them is capable enough to stop Mönkhbat."

Junjie: "What are you going to do?"

Mysterious girl: "I can't do anything. Someone needs to stop him, and that someone is you."

Junjie: "What? Why am I that someone? How am I even going to do it? I'm not even good enough."

Mysterious girl: "You don't need to be good, it's just a leap of faith. You've never wondered why your master chose you?"

Junjie: "No, why did he?"

Mysterious girl: "He saw something in you, something no one else sees; something special. I also see the same in you."

Junjie: "I don't think I can do this. Why don't you do it? You're better than me."

Mysterious girl: "I may be better than you, but I've come to realize that it's not my destiny; destiny is inevitable. I was almost killed trying to."

Junjie: "Serious?"

The mysterious girl turns, looking away.

Mysterious girl: "Yes. (Beat) I hear cries from the imperial city. Junjie, you must move quickly. China needs you."

Junjie: "How will I —"

Mysterious girl interrupts.

Mysterious girl: "Overcome your fear. You'll overcome everything."

The mysterious girl walks a distance away, then stops, pondering on her journey ahead.

Junjie meets Fenhua and Raccomato.

Junjie: "I think I have to do this. Duizhǎng, it will be dangerous out there; you should stay with her."

Raccomato: "(searching) Who?"

Junjie points at the mysterious girl.

Junjie: "Her."

Raccomato: "(whispering) I can't stay with her; she's got those blades. She's gonna eat me for lunch!"

Junjie: "No, she wouldn't; she's good."

Raccomato: "(raising an eyebrow) Really?"

Junjie: "Yeah!"

As they look up to the mysterious girl, she's no longer there.

They freeze in surprise.

Raccomato: "Maybe she doesn't want me to go with her."

Junjie: "Okay, let's go."

Junjie, alongside Raccomato riding on Fenhua, bursts into the forest trail. They see Mongol soldiers on horse, perhaps searching for the mysterious girl as their master urged them. The soldiers spot Junjie and chase him. Junjie races heavily, Fenhua's hooves pounding against the ground. The Mongol soldiers pursue relentlessly. As Junjie passes a pillar of unstable rocks, he strikes the rocks strategically. The rocks fall, creating a barrier on the path of the Mongol soldiers, temporarily restraining them.

Raccomato: "Aha! That's what you get when you cross a panda with a lizard!"

Junjie urges Fenhua forward.

Junjie: "HeeYaa!"

They gallop towards the imperial city, determined to face the impending danger.

The imperial city lay in ruins as Junjie arrived. Chaos unfolded: civilians fled, swords clashed, and the stench of death hung heavy. Junjie, horror etched on his face, dismounted from his horse.

Junjie: "This is where I say bye for now. Duìzhǎng, Fenhua, find somewhere safe."

Raccomato: "Alright, kid. (Raccomato greets Junjie in a Kung Fu gesture, and Junjie nods in response.)"

Raccomato spurred Fenhua forward.

Raccomato: "HeeYaa! (Screaming in a silly manner, with eyes widened) Run! Run! Run! This is battle people!"

They galloped away. Junjie chuckled briefly before turning to confront the grim reality.

"Is it really necessary to do this?" Junjie skeptically questioned, "Or is this just a suicide mission?" He signed, then mustered the courage, "Fine, I'll do this, for my family."

Grabbing a sword from the ground, he plunged into the fray, a whirlwind of steel and determination. Mongol soldiers fell before him as he fought with skill and ferocity.

In the midst of the relentless battle, Junjie's eyes caught sight of Ling An. Overwhelmed with joy, he rushed towards Ling An.

Junjie: "Zhǎngwò!"

Reaching his master, Junjie questioned Ling An's sudden departure.

Junjie: "Zhǎngwò."

Ling An: "Hey! Look at ya! You made it!"

Junjie: "Why'd you leave like that? I was so worried."

Ling An: "It was my last test on you. It's obvious you made it. It's time to face the call."

Junjie, though still skeptical, nodded.

Junjie: "I guess —"

With a swift spin of his sword, Junjie charged into the heart of the battle. Ling An wielded the Mystical Blade with grace, joining the fight with a mesmerizing display of skill.

Meanwhile, in the imperial city, Mönkhat and his formidable Mongol Elites rode on horseback, leading a relentless march towards the Wumen/Meridian gate. The gate stood locked, defended by Chinese soldiers. The clash of swords and the pounding of hooves created a cacophony as the Mongols and Chinese forces clashed.

Despite the resistance, the Mongols prevailed, breaking through the defenses and forcing the gate open.

Mönkhat signaled his men, and they surged into the Forbidden City, ready to unleash chaos upon its sacred grounds.

Within the Wumen/Meridian gate, Chinese soldiers burst forth from every corner, charging with battle cries that echoed through the chaos. The clash of swords and the fierce determination of the Chinese soldiers reverberated against the looming threat of Mönkhat and his Elite, who advanced relentlessly towards the palace.

Outside the Wumen/Meridian gate, Junjie and Ling An sprinted towards the chaotic scene. They came to a sudden stop, confronted by the wide-open gate and the tumultuous clash of swords.

Ling An: "(awe) What a mess!"

Junjie: "Where's the Emperor?"

Ling An: "(pointing) Down in the Palace of Heavenly Purity."

Junjie: "We need to get past these monkeys."

Ling An: "You said it!"

With determination in their eyes, Junjie and Ling An charged into battle, pushing through the gateway and venturing into the Forbidden City.

Amidst the chaos, Junjie spotted Xiu Lan. She looked up, smiled, and greeted him in a Kung Fu gesture. Junjie returned the greeting, and together, they fought with a fluid grace, steadily advancing towards the palace.

However, in the midst of the fierce combat, tragedy struck. An arrow pierced through the air, finding its mark in Ling An.

Amidst the chaos, Junjie's world crumbled as he raced to Ling An, who lay dying and struggling to speak.

Junjie: "No! Please no! Zhǎngwò! "

Ling An: "Junjie. The time has come... You... You must..."

Junjie: "What!? Zhǎngwò! Must what!?"

Ling An: "(Barely audible) Go —"

Junjie: "(Uncomprehending) Go where, Zhǎngwò!? Go where!?"

Ling An: "(Vision blurring) Take the Mystical Blade; this day, you've become the new guardian of the Mystical Blade. The ancestors bear me witness — I ordain you as its new bearer and guardian. Go now — go save China. China needs you."

Junjie: "No! No! (Tears roll down his cheek) Please stay with me, Zhǎngwò. I can't do this, without you."

Ling An grows still. Devastation consumes Junjie, and Xiu Lan looks on with sorrow. Junjie, overcome with grief, flees, driven by his loss, the weight of his new responsibility and the urgent call to save China.

Within the confines of a cavernous war room, Junjie sat on the floor, leaning on a pillar, tears streaming down his cheeks. A beat passed before Xiu Lan entered. She approached Junjie and knelt beside him.

Xiu Lan: "Junjie, you can't continue like this. You have to be strong. China needs you."

Junjie: "Why do they need me? What do they need me for? What can I even do?"

Xiu Lan: "You can do more than you know."

Junjie: "Why do you so much believe in me?"

Xiu Lan: "Because Ling An believed in you. He chose you because he saw something in you, a valiant soul. He didn't make a mistake in choosing you. He chose you right."

Junjie: "You do believe in me, some others believe in me, but I don't even believe in myself. Zhǎngwò was wrong about me. I'm worthless. He believed in me, but I can't really do anything. He made a mistake by choosing me."

Xiu Lan: "No, he didn't."

Junjie: "Yes, he did. Now he's gone. It's just me, (warmly) alone."

Xiu Lan: "Your master was a shaman. He didn't just choose you independently, the gods chose you."

Junjie: "What! How'd you know?"

Xiu Lan: "He was a sorcerer apprentice before being entrusted with the Mystical Blade, seventeen years ago. We all thought he was lost."

Xiu Lan produced the book JĪNGTŌNG from her sack bag and handed it to Junjie, who was startled.

Xiu Lan: "I had to bring it along with me. I knew all this while. Your mater chose you right."

Junjie: "He tried telling me. I just didn't understand."

Xiu Lan dropped the Mystical Blade beside Junjie, then stood up and motioned toward the exit door. She stopped, looked at Junjie.

Xiu Lan: "You have to get out of it, Junjie. China needs you."

As Xiu Lan walked away, Junjie opened the book. Tears streamed down his face, falling onto the pages.

The wise words of Ling An began to echo in his ears.

Junjie, overcome with sadness, realized he couldn't stay lonely forever. He must face the path he was trained for. Making a firm decision, he closed the book, picked up the Mystical Blade, and stood up, prepared to confront his fate.

As dusk settled, Mönkhbat and his men reached Qianqing Men/Gate of Heavenly Purity. Slaughtering Chinese soldiers, they advanced through the gate.

Chinese soldiers surrounded the palace door. Mönkhbat and his Elite men dismounted, readying their swords. Advancing alongside other Mongol soldiers, they slaughtered the defenders. Mönkhbat and his Elite entered the palace.

Back in the Forbidden City, the war raged on. Junjie and Xiu Lan ran toward the widely opened Qianqing Men/Gate of Heavenly Purity, entering as they were restrained by Mongol soldiers. Horror struck Junjie as he witnessed the lifeless bodies and blood spilled of Chinese soldiers.

The Mongol soldiers charged into battle—the clash of steel and cries of war echoed through the once serene palace grounds.

In the throne room, the Emperor paced anxiously, Qi Rong and soldiers by his side. The doors blasted open, and Mönkhbat and his Elite entered.

Mönkhbat: "Well, well, well, it seems the Emperor has vacated his throne. Let someone better take it."

Gang Zhou: "Stay back. You're through with your rampage, Mönkhbat. It's over."

Mönkhbat: "My rampage is just getting started."

Gang Zhou and his army charged into battle, confronting Mönkhbat. Qi Rong sought refuge.

Gang Zhou and Mönkhbat clashed in a fierce duel.

Mönkhbat: "You think a mere soldier like you can defeat me? Not even your father could."

Undeterred, Gang Zhou fought on, his soldiers engaging the Elite Mongols.

Gang Zhou: "You murdered my father. You will pay!"

In the chaos, two Elite Mongols seized the Emperor. Gang Zhou, noticing too late, shouted.

Gang Zhou: "No!"

Exploiting this distraction, Mönkhbat delivered a devastating blow, sending Gang Zhou crashing against the wall, unconscious.

Mönkhbat strode away. The Elite Mongols swiftly overpowered Gang Zhou's men, leaving them unconscious in their wake while some dead. The throne room fell into the oppressive silence of defeat.

Within the interior of the Qianqing Men/Gate of Heavenly Purity, the aftermath of the battle was evident, with lifeless bodies scattered. Junjie and Xiu Lan, victorious but weary, stood amid the grim scene.

Xiu Lan: "Come on."

As they hurried toward the palace—

In the throne room, Gang Zhou and his men were regaining consciousness when Junjie and Xiu Lan burst in.

Xiu Lan: "What happened?"

Gang Zhou: "(Recovering) Mönhbat... (Coughing) He has the Emperor."

Junjie: "(horrified, softly) No!"

Two Elite Mongols dragged the Emperor to the end of the imperial palace tower, Mönhbat entering with a sinister smile.

Mönhbat: "(To men) Guard the door."

The door closed, leaving the Emperor isolated atop the tower.

CHAPTER 6

THREADS OF FATE

In the palace hallway, Mongol soldiers guarded the entrance to the tower. Junjie, Gang Zhou, Xiu Lan, Dong, Gen, Han, and others hid around a corner. Junjie peeked at the Mongols, Gang Zhou growing impatient.

Gang Zhou: "We really need to hurry.

Xiu Lan restrained him.

Xiu Lan: "Hold on, General."

Junjie: "We need a plan. If we go out casually, we won't make it. Mönkhbat is at the top, with guards down here and... (Pointing) ...up there. We'll get past these guards; Captain Lan, Dong, and I will go get the Emperor. The General will then stop Mönkhbat."

Dong and Gen furrowed at Junjie.

Gang Zhou couldn't help but interject, his skepticism evident in his crossed arms. "And when did you become the master planner?" he challenged, a hint of sarcasm lacing his tone.

Xiu Lan: "There's no time for that, General. Mönkhbat has the Emperor, and we don't have much time."

Gang Zhou: "C'mon, people! I'm the General here! And how can he decide a plan? The least in my army, never successful during training, always a disaster, a practical loser. How can a loser strategize a plan?"

Junjie is undeterred, the Mongol soldiers detected sounds. The Mongol archer readied an arrow, while the others prepared their swords.

Gang Zhou's voice echoed through the intense atmosphere.

Gang Zhou: "I give the orders here!"

Xiu Lan countered with urgency.

Xiu Lan: "Bring it down, General! You'll get us killed!"

Gang Zhou refused to heed her words.

Gang Zhou: "Don't tell me to—"

In a swift move, Xiu Lan delivered a powerful punch to Gang Zhou's face. He staggered, clutching his face in defeat.

Xiu Lan: "We're going with Junjie's plan."

As the Mongol soldiers readied themselves, their intent clear, they turned, seeking the intruders.

Xiu Lan's voice echoed from behind.

Xiu Lan: "I'd step aside if I were you."

The Mongol soldiers turned to see Chinese warriors standing in formation, swords at the ready. With a spin of their blades, the Chinese soldiers charged into battle.

Back in the palace tower, Mönkhat circled the Emperor, taunting him.

Mönkhat: "Almighty Emperor, Lord of the great China! Guarded by thousands of armies, thousands of captains across the provinces! Strongly trained, highly armed—the most powerful army in the world! But where are they? How disappointing."

Emperor: "Why are you doing this? What do you want, Mönkhat?"

Mönkhat: "I want revenge on you and all of China."

Emperor: "Leave China out of this; they owe you nothing. Whatever vendetta you have is against me."

Mönkhat: "China will fall."

Emperor: "China cannot be toppled. I will not fight you, Mönkhat, my armies will come for you."

Mönkhat: "Can you even beat me? I've always been better and stronger than you, Emperor Fa Chun. You and your armies are weak!"

Mönkhat motioned to the parapet, looking down at the chaos in the imperial city—smoke curling into the sky, lifeless bodies strewn about.

Mönkhat: "What an irony. Look at how my soldiers have conquered all your armies. Even your greatest forces have fallen. It's just you and me. This is what my father always wanted, to bring China to her feet. Give up... (He drew his sword, pointing it at the Emperor, who remained steadfast) ...Bow to me!"

Meanwhile, as the battle raged in the palace hallway, Junjie scanned the surroundings for a quicker route to the Emperor. His eyes locked onto a staircase. He saw the parapet of the tower door and the pillars holding it up. Calling out to his comrades:

Junjie: "Guys... (Gang Zhou, Xiu Lan, and Dong turned) ...come on!"

With incredible agility, Junjie ran and leaped onto the staircase rail, then vaulted to a pillar. The Mystical Blade pierced into the pillar, and he clung to it. Swinging from the pillar, he soared over to the parapet. Junjie extended his hand, attempting to summon the Mystical Blade, but to his dismay, it remained still. He turned to face the twin Elite Mongols standing guard at the tower door, their swords gleaming in the moonlight. Frustration and urgency filled Junjie's voice as he muttered to himself, "Come on, come on. Zhǎngwò didn't get to teach me this." Gang Zhou, Xiu Lan, and Dong, watched in astonishment and confusion at Junjie's sudden actions. As the twin Elite Mongols advanced, swords drawn, Junjie sprang into action. With lightning-fast reflexes, he evaded their strikes, leaving the Mystical Blade behind momentarily. Gang Zhou, Xiu Lan, and Dong hurried toward the stairs, their movements mirroring the urgency of the situation.

The two Elite Mongols charged at Junjie, launching a relentless assault. The battle was intense; Junjie deftly dodged their strikes.

As Junjie fell to the ground, he executed a swift kick, sending one Elite Mongol sprawling. In one fluid motion, he rose and delivered a powerful blow to the other Elite's face. The soldier staggered, enraged, and launched a fierce counterattack. Junjie skillfully evaded the strikes, responding with a lightning-fast blow to the midsection. The force of his strike sent the Elite hurtling against the parapet, shattering it before tumbling over.

Gang Zhou, Xiu Lan, and Dong rushed in.

Junjie: "General, go!"

Gang Zhou raced toward the tower door.

Meanwhile, in the interior, Mönkhbat confronted the Emperor.

Mönkhbat: "No one will come for you. Your walls have fallen, and so shall you."

The Emperor remained eerily still, facing the impending threat with unyielding resolve.

Emperor: "If the walls of China fall, the greatness of China can never fall."

Mönkhbat: "(Snaky) You still call your nation great?! I will burn China and everything in it to the peak, and China will be history!"

As Mönkhbat prepared his fatal blow, Gang Zhou intervened, blocking his sword with a resounding clang. Rolling deftly, he delivered a powerful donkey kick, sending Mönkhbat crashing against a pillar. Gang Zhou thrust his sword, but Mönkhbat caught the blade, pulling Gang Zhou off balance.

Junjie: "Dong, get the Emperor!"

Dong: "Come on, your majesty."

Dong swiftly escorted the Emperor away. As Junjie and Xiu Lan exited the room, they turned back to witness the ongoing struggle. Mönkhbat delivered a devastating blow to Gang Zhou, sending him hurtling through the air. Junjie and Xiu Lan gasped in horror. Junjie, haunted by Ling An's words, "Go now — go save China. China needs you."

Mönkhbat: "(Evil chuckle; motioning to Gang Zhou) You take yourself to be a hero? Even your father, a hero, fell years ago. He could not stop me. I thought the hero was supposed to be Ling An's boy."

Junjie is startled. Mönkhbat seized Gang Zhou by the collar, forcing him to face him.

Mönkhbat: "Where is the boy?"

Gang Zhou: "(Spits on Mönkhbat's face) Ptooey. I don't know what you're talking about. You're crazy."

Mönkhbat's anger transformed into pure rage, and he forcefully hurled Gang Zhou to the ground.

Mönkhbat: "Perhaps, he has fallen, and so shall you!"

As he raised his sword, poised to strike, Junjie's slipper hit him from behind.

Junjie: "Enough! (Warmly) Let him go. I'm the one you're looking for. I am Ling An's boy."

Mönkhbat: "(Startled) Ling An's boy, strong and alive."

He dropped Gang Zhou and turned his attention to Junjie.

Xiu Lan: "Stay away from the child."

Xiu Lan drew her sword, launching an attack on Mönkhbat, followed by Gang Zhou.

Mönkhbat skillfully dodged and blocked their strikes. He dealt Xiu Lan a fierce blow, sending her flying out of the door. Disarming Gang Zhou, he delivered a ruinous blow, sending him crashing against a pillar outside. The pillar cracked. Gang Zhou and Xiu Lan lay unconscious. Mönkhbat turned to face Junjie.

Mönkhbat: "It's now you and I, boy."

With Mönkhbat charging toward him, Junjie's heart raced. Dodging the attack, he rolled to retrieve his slipper, quickly slipped it back on, and seized Gang Zhou's sword from the ground. With determination etched on his face, Junjie rejoined the fray, the clash of swords resounding through the air as the battle intensified.

Mönkhbat overwhelmed Junjie, sending him flying. Undeterred, Junjie rose as Mönkhbat charged again. Swiftly dodging strikes, Junjie countered with a precise blow to Mönkhbat's shoulder. Mönkhbat stumbled back.

Mönkhbat: "Not bad, boy. But you're not going to beat me that easily."

Junjie: "Oh yeah, I will."

Mönkhbat: "Let me see you try."

They charged at each other, swords clashing. The fight persisted, with Junjie delivering a swift kick that sent Mönkhbat sprawling to the ground.

Junjie: "I lost my Zhǎngwò, all because of you!"

He pointed his sword at Mönkhbat, who defiantly rose to continue the fight. Swords clashed with a resounding thud, the intensity of their struggle echoing through the air. Mönkhbat delivered a powerful backhand, smacking Junjie to the ground.

Mönkhbat: "Did you care about what I lost?!"

Junjie, on the ground, glanced defiantly at Mönkhbat.

Mönkhbat faced off against Junjie.

Junjie: "What did you lose?! What did the Emperor ever do to you?!"

Mönkhbat struck relentlessly at Junjie, who skillfully blocked the attacks while crawling backward.

Mönkhbat: "I've lost a lot because of your Emperor!"

Junjie: "That doesn't justify taking innocent lives! You can't take any more lives!"

Mönkhbat, fueled by rage, declared, "China will fall by my blade until I find your Emperor!"

Junjie, resolute, retorted, "You'll never see him!"

As Junjie reached the wall, Mönkhbat flung his sword aside. Lunging with his own blade, Mönkhbat struck, but Junjie rolled to the side, narrowly avoiding the attack. Mönkhbat's sword pierced through the wall. Seizing the opportunity, Junjie kicked Mönkhbat's feet off the ground, then delivered a powerful kick, sending him crashing against the parapet.

Junjie: "Haven't enough lives been lost?!"

Mönkhbat, undeterred, growled, "I will take more lives until I get the Emperor!"

Junjie responded sternly, "I won't let you!"

Mönkhbat glared at Junjie, the battle between them reaching a critical juncture.

Mönkhbat: "My vendetta is not against you, but since you don't want to relent, you're going to die."

Junjie: "Zhǎngwò taught me never to relent."

Junjie charged towards Mönkhbat, who skillfully dodged every strike. Despite the relentless assault, Mönkhbat managed to kick Junjie away, then pulled his sword from the wall.

Mönkhbat: "Too bad you'll fall like your master."

Junjie: "(Panting) Not that easily. Not with your mini punches. Maybe you should do better."

Mönkhbat: "(Groaning) Grrrr... Stubborn child!"

They charged at each other, swords clashing in a symphony of steel. Mönkhbat deftly dodged Junjie's attacks, kicking him away and sending him flying against the wall.

Junjie, panting heavily, feels the weight of Mönkhbat's formidable presence bearing down on him. Despite his exhaustion, he knows he cannot relent now. With determination burning in his eyes, Junjie charges toward Mönkhbat, but his efforts are futile against the Mongol leader's skill. Mönkhbat effortlessly catches Junjie's strikes, delivering devastating blows that leave Junjie reeling in pain. A deep cut on his arm elicits a groan of agony from Junjie as he struggles to keep fighting. With each blow from Mönkhbat, Junjie's resolve is tested, but he refuses to give up. A severe blow to Junjie's face sends him flying backward, the force of the impact reverberating through his body. Despite the pain, Junjie summons the last of his strength and charges back at Mönkhbat, desperation driving him forward. But Mönkhbat proves too powerful, effortlessly flinging Junjie's sword aside and dominating the battle. Junjie fights on, his weariness evident as he throws a punch at Mönkhbat, only to have it effortlessly caught and his fingers twisted in a painful grip.

Crying out in agony, Junjie attempts another attack, but Mönkhbat swiftly seizes his second hand, twisting his fingers once more. The pain is unbearable as Junjie struggles against Mönkhbat's grip, each movement sending waves of agony through his body. Finally, Mönkhbat delivers a powerful kick that sends Junjie stumbling backward, crashing into the ground before hitting the wall with a resounding thud. As Junjie lies on the ground, his body battered and broken, tears stream down his face in silent agony. The pain is overwhelming, both physical and emotional, as he cries out for his master, Zhǎngwò, in desperation.

Junjie: "Zhǎngwò, I need you... I can't do this..."

His voice breaks with emotion, the weight of his injuries and the seemingly insurmountable odds pressing down on him. Mönkhbat, his tone dripping with false sympathy, approaches Junjie with a mocking smirk.

Mönkhbat: "Does it hurt, little boy? I am so sorry..."

With a cruel grin, he grabs Junjie by the neck, lifting him off the ground and cutting off his air supply. Junjie gasps for breath, his struggles becoming more desperate by the second.

Mönkhbat: "The little boy is calling for his master... Soon, you will join him in the Netherworld."

The words hang heavy in the air, the threat of death looming over Junjie like a dark cloud. In a final act of defiance, Junjie summons the last of his strength, driving his foot into Mönkhbat's stomach with all his might. As Mönkhbat doubles over in pain, Junjie seizes the opportunity, using his leg to twist Mönkhbat's hand, breaking the bones with a sickening crunch. Mönkhbat howls in agony as he releases Junjie, who wastes no time. With a grim determination, Junjie rolls to the side, trying to catch his breath as he snatch his sword from the ground, preparing for the next phase of the battle.

As Junjie lies on the ground, his breaths coming in ragged gasps, he feels a surge of determination welling up inside him. Remembering the teachings of his master, Zhǎngwò, he knows that he is not alone. With a silent prayer, he calls upon the strength and guidance of his ancestors, seeking their help in this moment of dire need. Mönkhbat, his rage boiling over, clenches his fist tightly around

his injured left arm, gritting his teeth against the pain. Gripping his sword tightly in his right hand, he launches himself at Junjie with a furious roar. But Junjie, drawing upon the strength of his ancestors, rises to his feet with surprising agility, narrowly evading Mönkhbat's deadly strike. The battle between them reaches a fever pitch, each blow exchanged with lightning speed and deadly precision. Mönkhbat's sword slashes through the air with terrifying force, while Junjie, fueled by sheer determination, fights back with everything he has. Despite his injuries, he moves with a grace and agility that belies his pain, each movement calculated and precise. In a moment of opportunity, Junjie manages to land a solid blow on Mönkhbat's injured left arm, eliciting a pained groan from his adversary. The tide of the battle shifts slightly, as Mönkhbat reels from the strike, his movements momentarily slowed by the pain coursing through his body. But Junjie knows that he cannot afford to let up now, pressing forward with renewed determination as he continues to face off against his formidable opponent. As Junjie struggles to his feet, his determination burns brighter than ever. With a fierce resolve in his eyes, he vows to disarm Mönkhbat, to sever the very arm that had sought to strangle the life from him moments before. Mönkhbat, sensing Junjie's determination, becomes even more ferocious in his assault, unleashing a barrage of fatal strikes with his sword. Junjie, though battered and bruised, manages to dodge each blow with lightning-fast reflexes, his movements fluid and precise. But Mönkhbat, fueled by rage and desperation, refuses to relent, his attacks growing more relentless with each passing moment. In a sudden, brutal motion, Mönkhbat delivers a devastating head-butt to Junjie, sending him hurtling through the air. Junjie crashes to the ground, his head spinning with pain, but he refuses to succumb. As Mönkhbat advances upon him once more, Junjie grits his teeth and prepares to defend himself. With a swift and calculated response, Junjie launches himself into action, meeting Mönkhbat's attack head-on. Though frustration simmers beneath the surface, Junjie remains focused, his mind sharp as he observes Mönkhbat's every move. Yet even in his contemplation, he is not immune to Mönkhbat's onslaught, and a powerful blow sends him sprawling to the ground once more.

But Junjie is not one to stay down for long. With a determined grunt, he pushes himself back to his feet, his resolve unbroken. Despite the pain coursing through his body, he stands ready to face whatever challenges lie ahead, his spirit unyielding in the face of adversity. With the focus of a master, Junjie channels the power of the Eagle's Gaze, his eyes locked on Mönkhbat with unwavering intensity. He studies every subtle movement, every shift in posture, committing them to memory as he prepares to counter each of Mönkhbat's attacks. As Mönkhbat launches a flurry of strikes, Junjie's reflexes are lightning-fast, his movements fluid and precise. With a deft combination of dodges and parries, he evades each blow with ease, leaving Mönkhbat bewildered by his newfound skill. Seizing the opportunity, Junjie strikes back with a series of precise cuts, each one finding its mark on Mönkhbat's body. In the midst of their relentless fight, Mönkhbat delivered a powerful blow, smacking Junjie and sending him flying. As Junjie recovered, Mönkhbat lunged forward with a fierce cry, his sword aimed at Junjie's heart. With remarkable skill, Junjie parried Mönkhbat's strike and stepped to the side, seizing the opportunity to deliver a fatal blow to Mönkhbat's side, cutting deep. Mönkhbat groaned in pain, swinging his sword wildly. Junjie, agile and determined, ducked and unleashed a series of rapid strikes, brutally overpowering his opponent. With each strike, the tide of the battle begins to turn in Junjie's favor, his confidence growing with each passing moment. In a bold move, Junjie disarms Mönkhbat, snatching the sword from his hand with lightning speed. With a swift motion, he thrusts the blade into Mönkhbat's left arm, eliciting a pained groan from his adversary. But Junjie is not finished yet. With a determined glare, he sweeps Mönkhbat's legs out from under him, sending him crashing to the ground with a resounding thud.

As Mönkhbat struggles to regain his footing, Junjie delivers a powerful kick, sending him hurtling backwards and crashing against the unforgiving stone wall.

Mönkhbat falls to the ground, wounded, and Junjie hesitated to deliver the final blow. Looking at Mönkhbat with a mix of respect and pity, he urged him to stay down.

Junjie: "Stay down! It's over."

Mönkhbat: "(In pain) Not for me."

Junjie: "You're no longer a threat to China. Your rampages are over. You'll face the consequences of your crimes."

Mönkhbat: "I do not give up. I prefer death to defeat."

He defiantly pulled his sword from his left arm and, with a swift and determined motion, stabbed himself.

Junjie: "No!"

Mönkhbat lay on the ground, the battlefield around him eerily silent. His lifeblood seeps out onto the cold, unforgiving floor, forming a dark pool beneath him. The echoes of the fierce battle still linger, but now there is an unsettling stillness.

Junjie, the victor in this brutal conflict, watches in despair as the once formidable foe succumbs to the inevitability of mortality. The Mongol warrior's breathing grows labored, each exhale a struggle against the encroaching darkness. His vision dims, and the weight of defeat settles upon him. Junjie, standing amidst the aftermath, can't escape the melancholy of the moment. The cost of victory is steep, and the toll of war is etched on both the victor and the vanquished.

In this poignant scene, time seems to stretch, allowing the gravity of the situation to sink in. The contrast between the fierce battle and the hushed aftermath is a stark reminder of the transient nature of triumph and the profound impact of conflict on the human soul.

Xiu Lan and Gang Zhou start to recover. As they regain their strength, Xiu Lan rushes into the tower. Junjie spots her.

Junjie: "It's over."

The rest of the soldiers run in, overwhelmed with joy. They hoist Junjie onto their shoulders, celebrating the hard-fought victory. Gang Zhou, Xiu Lan, and Qi Rong watch with gladness. Close on Junjie's wide-eyed expression as they toss him into the air, a genuine smile gracing his face. As they toss him again...

The Emperor clears his throat from the doorway, capturing everyone's attention. They turn to see the Emperor solemnly approaching. The soldiers respectfully part, revealing Junjie. He nervously bows his head.

Emperor: "I've heard great deals about you, Wang Junjie. How you entered the army, how it was disastrous, frustrating, and overwhelming for you."

His right hand reaches Junjie's shoulder. Junjie looks up at the Emperor.

Emperor: "But you have proven yourself to be one with destiny. Because of you, no more lives will be lost. The anxiety of China has ended; from now on, China will sleep well. This day marks an unforgettable event in all the history of China. Generations will always remember the day you saved China. (Beat) Thank you."

The Emperor smiles, and Junjie returns the gesture. The Emperor reaches around his neck.

Emperor: "(Giving Junjie his pendant) Take this. So that your family will know what you've done for me and for all of China."

Junjie graciously accepts the Emperor's gift, his expression a mix of gratitude and humility. He turns to see Dong and his friends, who bow apologetically.

Dong: "We're sorry, for all we did to you, Junjie."

Junjie embraces each of them, a silent understanding passing between them. Xiu Lan approaches, and Junjie hurriedly pulls her into a warm hug.

Junjie: "Thank you, for believing so much in me."

Xiu Lan reacts, pleasantly surprised. She hugs back. Junjie turns to Gang Zhou.

Gang Zhou: "...um... you're uh— (Shaking his hand) — you surprise me. You're highly blessed by your ancestors."

Junjie: "Thank you, General."

Gang Zhou: "Junjie, I'm... sorry for everything."

Junjie smiles.

Junjie is ready to go home. He whistles. A loud one.

Fenhua and Raccomato galloping in, with Raccomato holding a miniature sword.

Raccomato: "(cheering) I knew you got him, kid! We are victoria!"

Junjie: "(chuckles) Yeah, Duizhǎng, we are victo... (specifically focused on the "RIOUS") ...rious."

The Emperor and those standing nearby are startled by the sudden commotion.

Junjie softly strokes Fenhua's face, the horse whinnying in excitement.

Junjie: "Let's go home."

Raccomato, his eyes widening in alarm, takes in Junjie's battered appearance with concern.

Raccomato: "Oh my, you've been dreadfully battered! You need to go see a doctor, kid."

His voice carries genuine worry as he assesses Junjie's injuries, realizing the severity of the situation.

Xiu Lan nods in agreement, her expression mirroring concern.

Junjie, his voice strained but determined, reassures his sidekick.

Junjie: "Don't worry too much, Duizhǎng, it's no big deal."

Xiu Lan: "You know the pet is right, Junjie."

The Emperor, his tone authoritative yet compassionate, intervenes.

Emperor: "Yes, Junjie, I will summon the royal healers at once."

But Junjie, displaying a hint of stubbornness and self-reliance, interjects before the Emperor can act.

Junjie: "No worries, Your Majesty. My Māmā will take care of it, she's good at it."

A warm smile graces the Emperor's lips as he acknowledges Junjie's confidence in his mother's abilities.

Unbeknownst to Junjie, the Mystical Blade remains forgotten, hanging on the pillar nearby, its presence looming in the background.

As Junjie mounts Fenhua, a loud horse WHINNY echoes from atop the mountains. Everyone looks up to see MAZU standing pompously at the edge of the mountain. Junjie and Mazu's eyes meet.

Junjie: "(To himself) That's one spirit guide horse!"

CUT TO BLACK

Junjie's eyes slowly open, the world initially appearing as if veiled in a mist. Gradually, his gaze sharpens, the dimness giving way to the warm embrace of daylight streaming through the widely opened window. The morning sun paints the room with a golden hue.

As Junjie rises, he sits on the edge of his bed, a sense of disorientation lingering. His gaze wanders, absorbing the surroundings with a mix of familiarity and surrealism. It's as if he's awakening to a new reality, questioning whether the tumultuous events were nothing more than a dream that had briefly eclipsed the familiar contours of his life.

The scent of breakfast filled the air as Raccomato, dressed in an impromptu chef's outfit, twirled and hummed in Wang Min's kitchen. Junjie descended the stairs, catching sight of the culinary performance, and was greeted by Wang Min's warm embrace.

"Good morning, my little warrior," she said, gently stroking Junjie's head. Junjie, with a hint of realization, replied, "Good morning, Māmā."

"Hey Duìzhǎng, how're ya doing?" Junjie turned to Raccomato, who responded with a twirl.

"I'm doing great, just trying out these 365 recipes I discovered three years ago living in the garbage. You know, they're great," Raccomato declared, punctuating his words with playful culinary gestures. Laughter filled the room, joined by the whimsical tunes of Fenhua's whinnies outside the window.

"Kid, your cow's up already!" Raccomato quipped, prompting another chuckle from Junjie.

"Where's Pà?" Junjie inquired.

"He's out," Wang Min replied. As Junjie headed towards the door, she asked, "Where're you going, Junjie?"

"Just want to take a walk," he answered, and Wang Min's hand gently touched his face.

"I crave someday I'll take a walk with you, Junjie," she said, kissing Junjie on the forehead, Junjie smiled.

"Duìzhǎng, you're coming with me?" Junjie asked.

"Ho boy, I've got to finish my 365 recipes!" Raccomato replied with a grin, then rips off his make-shift chef wear and joins Junjie, and together, they left the kitchen resonating with laughter and the lingering aroma of silly recipe jokes.

Junjie, strolling through the village with Raccomato on Fenhua's back. The villagers waves at Junjie, who acknowledges the villagers' waving nervously. Raccomato, on the other hand, waves proudly. They reach a familiar field where Junjie had once faced defeat by a group of boys playing Frisbee. The same boys are engaged in the spirited game.

Raccomato: "(nostalgic) I used to play that game!"

Junjie: "You think we could give it a try?"

Raccomato: "Oh yeah!"

Fenhua whinnies, showing enthusiasm. The trio approaches the field.

Junjie: "Hey!"

The boys stop their game, and the owner of the Frisbee recognizes Junjie.

Owner of the Frisbee: "Hey, Junjie!"

Junjie greets them with a Kung Fu gesture.

Owner of the Frisbee: "What's up?"

Raccomato leaps from Fenhua into the field, starting to jog.

Raccomato: "Come on, kid, let's have some fun!"

Junjie: "What if we play against them?"

Owner of the Frisbee: "So you think?"

Raccomato, with a playful gesture, declares, "Absolutely!"

The boy who owns the Frisbee nods to his friends, and Raccomato, wearing a silly grin and making playful gestures with his fingers, exclaims, "Let's do this!"

The game kicks off with Junjie, Raccomato, and Fenhua facing off against the group of five boys.

Junjie, Raccomato, and Fenhua lock eyes with their opponents, determination burning in their gaze. The air is charged with the spirit of friendly competition as both sides prepare for the Frisbee game.

The makeshift referee throws the Frisbee which slices through the air, caught skillfully by Junjie. His Kung Fu skills come into play as he maneuvers with grace.

Raccomato: "Come on, kid! Over here! Over here! Angle 90! 90 degrees!"

Instead, Junjie throws it to Fenhua, who leaps gracefully, catching it with his teeth.

Raccomato: "Bummer."

Fenhua then tosses the Frisbee to Raccomato, who deftly catches it. Laughter and joy fill the air as Junjie, Raccomato, and Fenhua triumph over the group of boys. The scene pans up, revealing the four warriors Junjie encountered earlier at Ling An's tent.

EPILOGUE

As twilight casts its enchanting hues across the sky, the mysterious girl stands alone at the edge of a mountain. The soft whisper of the evening breeze gently tousles her hair as she gazes into the vastness beyond the horizon. There's a serene intensity in her eyes, reflecting the countless adventures she has embarked upon and the countless more awaiting on the uncharted paths ahead. Her silhouette against the fading sunlight paints a picture of introspection and anticipation, capturing the essence of a wanderer embracing the beauty and uncertainty of her unfolding journey.

"It may have ended, but our journey just began."

— *Mysterious Girl*